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# Playwriting

*FOR ELIZABETHANS*

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Number 167 of the *Columbia University Studies*  
*in English and Comparative Literature*

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# Playwriting

F O R

*ELIZABETHANS*

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1600-1605

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MARY CRAPO HYDE  
*(Mrs. Donald F. Hyde)*

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NEW YORK  
*Columbia University Press, 1949*

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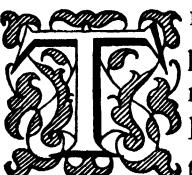
*AN UNWILLING ELIZABETHAN*





# Foreword

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HE omissions of those favored to live in a golden period of literature, however unconsciously they may be made, inevitably become major regrets of later generations. In the sixteenth century one of the most startling is the failure to define the Elizabethan theatre and to set forth the rules of playwriting with Aristotelian succinctness. It seems surprising, in a day when the drama held a place of eminence and the pamphlet form was freely employed, that no practical Elizabethan undertook so easy and rewarding a project. But no man of the theatre composed a treatise and no Elizabethan critic recorded more than a few scattered references to the theatre of his day: the criticisms of Philip Sidney, the hints of Thomas Heywood, and the occasional remarks of Ben Jonson. From Shakespeare came celebrated silence.

The disappointment of this omission makes the opinion of modern critics provocative when they assert that the dramaturgy of a period is no more than a record of the popular theatre practices of the time. If this premise be accepted, it is still possible to deduce an Elizabethan dramaturgy from a study of the conventions of the plays that are extant. Even though many plays have not survived, there remain a sufficient number for such a purpose.

Since a dramaturgy is most effective when it is definitive, the productions of a few consecutive years should be selected for detailed examination. These plays should be compared, one with another. The conventions which manifest themselves within this group should be compared with those employed in the Eliza-

bethan period generally and with those employed in representative dramas of earlier periods: the native miracles, mysteries, moralities, and interludes; the classic comedies of Plautus and Terence and the tragedies of Seneca; and the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, for despite the fact that the Greek drama was not familiar to the Elizabethan, its influence was profoundly felt through indirection.

In accepting the challenge that it is possible to deduce an Elizabethan dramaturgy from a study of extant plays, I have chosen the years 1600-1605<sup>1</sup> as a microcosm of investigation. I have studied, the productions which fall within the period rather than the first printing of plays, for though these appeared in general soon after the performance, there are many instances of a long time lapse between production and publication. More than eighty plays which were produced between 1600-1605 remain available.<sup>2</sup> These represent every distinctive dramatic type; and are examples of strong Elizabethan theatre. They include seven of Shakespeare's best known dramas, as well as important works by Jonson, Marston, Middleton, Dekker, Webster, Chettle, Heywood, and Chapman.

In an attempt to come as close as possible to the original conception of dramatic material, I have worked with the earliest texts available to me. However, I have noted in the Bibliography the more readily accessible editions, and for the benefit of the general reader I have also frequently referred in the text to modern scene divisions rather than to pagination signatures.

I am indebted to the late Dr. J. Q. Adams, and to Dr. James G. McManaway, Dr. Giles Dawson and Miss Dorothy Mason of the Folger Shakespeare Library for their generous assistance; and to Mr. Carl H. Pforzheimer for permission to examine his Elizabethan plays under the kind direction of Miss Emma Unger, his

<sup>1</sup> Although Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, the term Elizabethan drama commonly covers plays produced well into the next decade.

<sup>2</sup> According to Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama to 1616*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940.

librarian; and to Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach and Mr. John Fleming for their patient loan of many of the quartos.

I wish to thank Mr. Lionel Robinson of London for his efforts in locating several items of importance and Mr. Geoffrey Gomme for his dogged search for reprints.

I gratefully acknowledge the academic convention which has permitted me to work closely with Professor Oscar J. Campbell of Columbia University. The reassuring authority of his knowledge and his constant encouragement has been an inspiration to this undertaking.

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*Four Oaks Farm  
Far Hills, New Jersey  
8 November 1948*





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# Playwriting

*FOR ELIZABETHANS*





## *C H A P T E R I*

# Playwriting

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### *Background of Dramatic Theory*

Ian Elizabethan had been asked to state his theory of playwriting, he would doubtless have said he believed in the dictates of Aristotle and, if able, he would have quoted a passage or two from the *Poetics*. When pressed, however, he would confess that his knowledge of Aristotle came through such secondary sources as Horace and the Renaissance critics. If further pressed, he would admit that he was not sure which recommendations originated with Aristotle and which were the interpretations of later disciples. He would in the end excuse himself by saying that, through one source or another, Elizabethan playwrights bowed to the authority of the ancients in dramatic principles, but in dramatic conventions they followed the dictates of public taste. )

This admission bears consideration because it attests both to the strength and to the originality of the Elizabethan theatre. (It is at once an acknowledgment of authority and a defiance of it,) a characteristically Anglo-Saxon practice which accounts for more than that race's preeminence in playwriting. It means that the Elizabethan accepted unquestioningly the principles of drama which had

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been proven by the past, but those conventions which he found hampering to his theatre he abandoned without hesitation.

Either through wisdom or by instinct, the Elizabethan playwright clearly differentiated between the two types of rules which have been the basis of dramaturgies from the time of Aristotle to the present—principles and conventions. Only principles, the fundamental truths which govern dramatic form, can be given as rules for all time. They are universal and unchanging, based upon an old and respected game of make-believe, the one art in which life itself is re-created. In this art the author is required to present life according to the dramatic principles of selected action, of conflict, of obligatory scenes, of climax and of the inevitable change of circumstance.

It is not a dramatic requirement but a matter of convention, whether he shows his play in one scene or many, whether the action covers twenty-four hours or several years, whether the moods of comedy and tragedy are blended or held separate or whether a prologue or an epilogue is used. All these devices have been favored in some periods and scorned in others. Conventions, though they are invaluable contemporary hints, apply only to the theatre of the writer's time. They cannot be vested with authority beyond present practice because they are dictated by limitations of the stage or the actors or of public taste, and when a limitation is overcome or when taste changes, the convention it controls is customarily abandoned. Conventions are fashions of a time, and as is the case with fashions, have not only the quality of influence but also that of transience.

The basic fault of most dramaturgies, as well as the danger to those seeking guidance from them, has been the misinterpretation of the terms "principle" and "convention." Any attempt to interpret the influence of earlier dramaturgies upon the pragmatic Elizabethan playwright must be undertaken with a wariness equal to his spirit of independence, and with the constant realization that only dramatic principles maintain their authority, that conventions,

necessary and important to a particular theatre, lose their significance in another.

No one realized the distinction between principles and conventions more fully than Aristotle. In the clarity with which he differentiates between the two he reveals himself as both a master of general theory and an astute critic of the dramatic practices of his day. In the *Poetics* he sets forth with authority the general and fixed definitions of drama. In contrast, he considers the dramatic conventions of his time from various points of view. He does *not* believe that conventions should be the conveyance to posterity of hidebound rules. The conventions he notes are given simply as suggestions for the theatre of his day, observations based upon practices with which he was familiar. When he says, for instance, that he prefers a single plot, he gives the reason that "certain dramatists have tried to show the entire fall of Ilium and failed, while others like Euripides have done well with a part, as Aeschylus has with a part of the Niobe story."<sup>1</sup> An Elizabethan could not logically defend the single plot on the same grounds, for the successful plays with which he was familiar—the mysteries and moralities—were as epic as the sweep of events from Genesis to Judgment.

The Greek convention that the finest tragic characters should come only from certain houses, Aristotle admits to be a convention of the moment made valid by certain eminently successful interpretations. He says that though "the poets began by accepting any tragic story that came to hand, in these days the finest tragedies are always on the story of some few houses, on that of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus or any others that may have been involved as either agents or sufferers in some deed of horror."<sup>2</sup>

It is best, he believes, to have the characters involved "within the same family, since one is indifferent to evil done by one enemy to another, and though more moved when it is done by friend to

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, Tr. Ingram Bywater, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

friend, it is most piteous when it is done by one member of the family to another. The most tragic crime is the one committed unknowingly.”<sup>3</sup>

In considering the reason for the convention of having violent action take place off stage, Aristotle writes as follows: “Tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play which is the better way and shows the better poet . . . the Spectacle is less artistic and is an extraneous aid. Those, moreover, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear are wholly out of touch with Tragedy; not every kind of pleasure should be required of Tragedy, only its proper pleasure.”<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle is equally judicious in his discussion of the unities and his conclusions are practical suggestions, not arbitrary dictates as they have been interpreted to be by later critics. Of the unity of time, Aristotle simply says, in contrasting tragedy to epic poetry, that the latter “due to its action has no fixed limit of time whereas Tragedy endeavors to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun or something near that.”<sup>5</sup> He qualifies this statement further by saying that though this is the present convention “at first the practice in this respect was just the same in Tragedies as in Epic Poems.”

Aristotle makes no reference to the unity of place. Of the unity of action he says only that a play should represent “one action, a complete whole with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole, for that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole.”<sup>6</sup> He adds, that in the case of tragedy these related incidents must not only be part of the whole but must also be incidents arousing pity and fear.

In reading the *Poetics* one cannot help but sense how alive Aristotle was to the advisability not only of present but of future

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

changes in playwriting technique. He notes, for instance, the dramatic necessity of the chorus in Aeschylus, its significance in Sophocles, and its relative unimportance in Euripides, words which Ben Jonson would have done well to heed in *Sejanus*. As it stands, Jonson is justified in apologizing for his superfluous use of a chorus of musicians. It is unfair to hold as infallible dictates advice given as a precaution against certain limitations of the stage after those limitations have ceased to exist, and more than unfair to uphold rules governing new conditions of which Aristotle had no knowledge. The convention of the Greek dramatic competitions that a tragedy be written in a single mood and in trilogy form was accepted unquestioningly by Aristotle but he would have been the last to force this restriction, no longer pertinent, upon the Elizabethan who happened to prefer the more natural mixture of tragedy and comedy. After all, even the Greek contestants concluded their presentations with the rough humor of a satyr play.

It is the height of irony that Aristotle, the outstanding example of a tolerant critic, should have been misrepresented by later generations as the uncompromising dictator of the classic rules. This doubtful and academic honor belongs to Horace, who lived some three hundred years after Aristotle, at a time when the theatre as such in Rome had so deteriorated that the problems involved in writing a play were reduced to a matter of theoretical discussion. Though his *Ars Poetica* was ostensibly written to guide a young friend named Piso, who aspired to write a play, Horace clearly shows that he doubted whether such a project would ever be undertaken either by Piso or by himself. He states his position with condescension: "I'll serve as a whetstone, which though it cannot cut of itself, can sharpen iron. Though I write nothing, I'll teach the business and duty of a writer; show where his materials can be found; what it is that trains and molds a poet, what becomes him, what does not, which way knowledge tends and which way error."<sup>7</sup> Conclusive evidence that Horace did not seriously expect his pupil to have success with a play appears in his parting advice: "If,

<sup>7</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, tr. and ed. Edward Henry Blakeney, pp. 48-49.

however, you should one day produce something, pray submit it first to Maecius the critic, to your father, or to me; and then put back the manuscript in your desk and let it stand over for a decade.”<sup>8</sup>

Horace does not seem interested in the problems of play structure. He speaks vaguely and indifferently on the subject. It is the poetic presentation of the form which interests him: diction, meter, rhythm, cadence, and harmony. Such matters he considers expertly and in detail, giving many illustrations of his own brilliant style. Now and then he seems to realize the necessity of giving some definite instruction and he brusquely, didactically, gives a few rules of play structure. These are based upon Aristotle and repeated without benefit of explanation or consideration of their interpretation in view of contemporary conditions.

In the space of twenty-three lines (lines 178–201) Horace prescribes most of the rules which for centuries enchainèd the classic imitators: that no violent action should take place on the stage, nothing which provokes either “disgust or incredulity”; that a play must be “five acts no more no less”; that no *Deus ex Machina* should be employed “unless a difficulty occurs worthy of such a deliverer”; that a cast should be limited, “the fourth actor should not be forward to speak”; that the function of the chorus “should be to discharge the part and duty of an actor with vigor and to chant nothing between the acts that does not forward the action and fit into the plot naturally.”

As for the choice of dramatic material, Horace allows “the common quarry will become your own right.” He warns young Piso against the peril of selecting original subjects, saying “you act more wisely by dramatizing the *Iliad* than by introducing a subject unknown and hitherto unsung.”<sup>9</sup> “Do, my friend,” he exhorts, “study the Greek masterpieces. Thumb them day and night.”<sup>10</sup>

Horace makes only a brief comment upon the mingling of tragedy and comedy, asserting:

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

a subject for Comedy refuses to be handled in tragic verse; the banquet of Thyestes disdains to be rehearsed in lines suited to daily life and right enough for Comedy. At times, however, Comedy exalts her voice and an angry Chremes rants and raves; often too, in a Tragedy Telephus or Peleus utters his sorrow in the language of prose, when poor and in exile, he flings aside his paint-pots and his words a yard long, in eagerness to touch the spectator's heart with his lamentable tale.<sup>11</sup>

Horace inveighs against the license and the coarse jests of the satyr plays, those overclose companions of tragedy. He objects to the fact that the gods "so conspicuous of late in royal gold and purple," sink in their discourse to the level of "tavern talk" while the fauns "languish in love verses like city exquisites." "If I should write a satyr play," Horace protests, "I should not choose bald everyday terms, nor so try to vary from tragic diction." In his suggestions for the improvement of the satyr-play form, one notes that his emphasis is, as before, upon matters of artistry rather than upon dramatic structure. This all-engrossing concern of the poet would seem to make Horace, both for his own and for later centuries, an unsound authority for the proper study of dramatic structure and dramatic devices.

However, Renaissance critics let Horace influence their theories of dramaturgy rather than Aristotle. They accepted Aristotle in name but Horace in fact, and they elaborated and refined his dicta with a literary ardor at once brilliant and wholly unrealistic. The preoccupation of such intellectuals as Robortello, Castelvetro, and Scaliger with this side of dramatic criticism seems now an unfortunate expenditure of time; while it has always been possible to argue the rules of drama endlessly in an academic void, it is an unproductive pastime.

In Italy the popularity of this abstract criticism was doubtless stimulating to men of letters, stimulating and destructive, for it stifled the growth of any native drama and prevented the Renaissance of the theatre in sixteenth century Italy where it had every

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

right to be expected. The purely native drama there, the *Commedia dell' Arte*, was more fully developed than any of the contemporary English dramatic types. But it was in England, early in the reign of the Tudors, that men of talent dared to turn from eclectic inspiration to the development of their own rude drama. Their courage was rewarded, for within the space of a few years they made this drama a respected art, a national sport, and the crowning literary glory of the century.

### *Elizabethan Criticism of the Theatre*

Of the scattered references to playwriting in contemporary Elizabethan works, the most famous mention, though not the most significant, is that of Sir Philip Sidney, who discusses the drama as a "part of Poesie" in his general defense of that art. It is interesting to note Sidney's comments upon the "ill uses" of the London stage; but as they are reviewed two things should be remembered, first, that he wrote in the eighties when few of the great Elizabethan plays had been produced, and second that his opinions upon drama came from a detached reading of the ancients and a casual observance of the theatre with which he had no close connection and of which he had no real understanding.

Our Tragedies and Comedies [he says], are (not without cause cried out against) observing rules neither of honest civility nor skillful poetry, excepting *Gorboduc* (again, I say, of those I have seen) which notwithstanding as it is full of stately speeches and well sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach; and so obtain the very end of Poesie; yet in truth it is very defective in the circumstances which grieveth me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all Tragedies, for it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For where the stage should always represent but one place and the uttermost time presupposed in it, should be, both by Aristotle's precept <sup>12</sup> and common reason but one

<sup>12</sup> This is not a fast rule of Aristotle, as is seen on p. 6 of this chapter, and on p. 34 of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

day: there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined. But if it be so in *Gorboduc*, how much more in all the rest? Where you shall have Asia on one side, and Africk on the other, and so many under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is; or else, the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by, we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame, if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that, comes out a hideous monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While in the mean-time, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?

Now, of time they are much more liberal. For ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love: after many traverses, she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy: he is lost, groweth a man, falls in love and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hours' space: which how absurd it is in sense, even sense can imagine, and Art hath taught, and all ancient examples justified: and at this day, the ordinary players in Italy will not err in.<sup>13</sup>

Sidney quickly answers a possible objection that might be raised by saying that though Terence's *Eunuchus* represents action of more than a day, and Plautus also "hath in one place done amiss," yet "let us hit with him and not miss with him."<sup>14</sup>

He continues by stating firmly that comedy and tragedy, and the characters respectively appropriate to them, should be held separate. He says defensively "I know the Ancients have one or two examples of Tragi-Comedy, as Plautus hath Amphitryo. But if we mark them well, we shall find that they never or very daintily match horn-pipes and funerals."<sup>15</sup>

Sidney follows this with the consideration of a play's purpose and in this his emphasis upon its moral message is interesting because his reasoning is unconsciously Elizabethan. He concludes with "I have lavished out too many words of this play matter. I

<sup>13</sup> Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie*, sig. I4 verso *et seq.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K2.

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do it because they are excellent parts of Poesie, so is there none so much used in England and none can be more pitifully abused.”<sup>16</sup> He then turns back to his general subject, the defense of “Poesie.”

Most of Sidney’s criticism of the technique of Elizabethan playwriting is based upon his refusal to let his imagination follow what he believes to be the absurd vagaries of authors. He unfortunately backs his plea for realism with a somewhat faulty interpretation of Aristotle. To be sure many of the theoretic extravagances of time and place which Sidney berates are unnecessary and even nonsensical. Sidney is quick to cite these weaknesses which are easy to parody, but what he does not note is that they are unimportant details in a consideration of the whole. Sidney fails to recognize the difference between intrinsic values and trivia, the distinction between dramatic principles and dramatic conventions. Though he reveals himself as a gentleman, a reader and a poet, he also reveals himself as scornful of the dramatic profession, completely lacking in any understanding of the problems of the contemporary stage and with no place in his heart for the theatre.

There are several remarks of Ben Jonson upon playwriting which carry the weight of more practical authority. This is to be expected since, unlike Sidney, Jonson had a very real, even if unhappy, contact with the theatre. His scattered references to playwriting are noteworthy. In *Timber; or, Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter* he makes a clear distinction between principles and conventions by saying that nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator, as the schools have done of Aristotle.<sup>17</sup> He further explains this statement in the introductory scene of *Every Man Out of His Humor* in which Cordatus, the author’s friend, is asked if this comedy conforms to “all the laws of Comedy,” and “equal division into Acts and Scenes, according to the Terentian manner, his true number of actors, the furnishing of the scene with a Chorus, and that the whole argument fall within the compass of a day’s business?” Cordatus replies by saying “Oh

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. K<sub>3</sub> verso.

<sup>17</sup> *Timber* appeared in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, Vol. II.

no, these are too nice observations. . . . No, I assure you, if those laws you speak of had been delivered to us, ab initio, and in their present virtue and perfection there had been some reason for obeying their powers"; but, he continues, since there were so many changes within the classic period itself "I see not but we should enjoy the same license or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention as they did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms, which the niceness of a few (who are nothing but form) would thrust upon us."<sup>18</sup>

Jonson continually complains about outworn classic conventions which are arbitrarily and unnecessarily followed, and he pokes fun at many of the contemporary absurdities which had also been noted by Sidney. Some of these "ill customs of the age" he describes in the prologue of *Every Man in His Humor*, and their similarity to those listed in the *Apologie* is striking. Jonson complains that many false poets

. . . make a child, now swaddled, to proceed  
 And then shoot up in one beard and weed  
 Past threescore years; or with three rusty swords  
 And help of some few foot and half foot words  
 Fight over York and Lancasters long wars  
 And in the tyring house bring wounds, to scars.  
 He rather prays, you will be pleased to see  
 One such, today, as other plays should be  
 Where neither Chorus wafts you o'er the seas  
 Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please  
 Nor nimble squib is seen to make afeared  
 The gentlewoman; nor rolled bullet heard  
 To say, it thunders; nor tempestuous drum  
 Rumbles to tell you when the storm doth come.  
 But deeds and language such as men do use  
 And persons such as Comedy would choose  
 When she would show an image of the times  
 And sport with humane follies, not with crimes.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humor*, in *Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, I, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Jonson, *Every Man in His Humor*, *ibid.*, p. 3.

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Unfortunately, even though Jonson clearly understood the position of dramatic conventions and usually handled these details with scrupulous care, he ignored the fundamentals. He is tricky with his characters, he ignores the rule of conflict, he skips obligatory scenes and defies the principles of climax and reversal. He lacks the emotional heart which makes a play beat. For these obvious reasons, though he himself could not understand, his plays never received the measure of applause which his genius so patently deserved.

Both Jonson and Sidney doubtless looked down upon Thomas Heywood as a miserable hack who practiced all the "ill customs of the age" without benefit of inspiration, but the fact is that he turned out, one after another, in a steady stream, actable plays that audiences applauded. Heywood was no genius, but a good, sound, and dependable craftsman who had an innate dramatic sense and a flair for play form. He stands out as an excellent representative of the general strength and weakness of Elizabethan playwriting, and for this reason the few references he makes to the subject in his *Apology for Actors* are tantalizing. It is a pity that he did not take a few more hours from his writing of plays in order to pen *An Apology for Playwriting*, because he was excellently qualified to undertake the task.

There is a contemporary pamphlet, however, of profound interest. It comes from Spain and the author was that country's most eminent playwright, Lope de Vega. It appears that he was persuaded to deliver a lecture before the Madrid Academy sometime in 1609 or before. His address to these "noble spirits, flower of Spain" was entitled *Arte nuevo de hazer comedias en este tiempo*. It was in metrical form, obviously a remote imitation of Horace's epistle, but written in the light, genial vein of an after-dinner speech. It was published in 1609 and fortunately has been preserved. At the time the discourse was delivered Lope de Vega's reputation as a playwright was firmly established. He himself refers blandly to the fact that he has "written four hundred and

eighty three comedies along with the one which [he] finished this week.”<sup>20</sup>

Lope salutes his distinguished audience with a double-edged compliment. He says that his assignment to speak on the art of writing a play “which is today acceptable to the taste of the crowd” would be easy “for any one of you who had written very few comedies, and who knows more about the art of writing them and of all these things; for what condemns me in this task is that I have written them without art.”<sup>21</sup>

Lope defines this term art as “old” art, that governed by the august though nebulous precepts of the past. The “new” art, which is the means of catering to the crowd, often defies past conventions and is barbarous in the extreme. Lope admits that this is the art he practices, but he stresses the fact that it is *not* because he is ignorant of the classic precepts: “thank God, even while I was a tyro in grammar, I went through the books which treated the subject, before I had seen the sun run its course ten times from the Ram to the Fishes.”<sup>22</sup> He has abandoned the classic rules, he says, because his fellow playwrights scorn them, and audiences scorn the products written according to their tenets. “True it is that I have sometimes written in accordance with the art which few know; but, no sooner do I see coming from some other source the monstrosities full of painted scenes where the crowd congregates and the women who canonize this sad business, than I return to that same barbarous habit, and when I have to write a comedy I lock in the precepts with six keys, I banish Terence and Plautus from my study that they may not cry out at me; for truth, even in dumb books, is wont to call aloud; and I write in accordance with that art which they devised who aspired to the applause of the crowd; for, since the crowd pays for the comedies, it is fitting to talk foolishly to it to satisfy its taste.”<sup>23</sup>

Before proceeding to detail the practices which please the crowd,

<sup>20</sup> Vega Carpio, *The New Art of Writing Plays*, tr. William Brewster, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Lope gives what he considers the necessary attention to the "old" art. As Brander Matthews comments "he supports his acceptance of the Classicist doctrine with a brave show of erudition and with mention of Cicero, Donatus, Robortello, Julius Pollux, Manetti, Plutarch, Athenaeus, Xenophon, Valerus Maximus, Pietro Crinito and Vitruvius."<sup>24</sup> Morel-Fatio's comment upon this pedantic parade is that it "has no solid foundation of scholarship, being entirely from two writers, Donatus, the commentator on Terence, and Robortello, the commentator on Aristotle and on Horace."<sup>25</sup> Be this as it may, it is obvious that Lope's interest is not in the old art any more than that of his hearers, and the main purpose of the classic allusions is a pleasing academic tribute to the learning of both the lecturer and his listeners.

There is a noticeable quickening of the author's pulse when he comes to the discussion of the present barbaric practices. The purpose of the stage, Lope finds, is "story telling." He does not stress the moral of the story as much as Heywood in his *Apology for Actors*, but he does believe that a play should point a moral. As for subjects, he suggests "equivoke and the uncertainty arising from ambiguity have always held a large place among the crowd, for it thinks that it alone understands what the other one is saying. Better still are the subjects in which honor has a part, since they deeply stir everybody; along with them go virtuous deeds, for virtue is everywhere loved."<sup>26</sup>

Comedy, Lope believes, should deal with "fiction" and tragedy with "history." He strongly favors the mixture of tragedy and comedy in a single piece because, he says, it is according to nature, and through such variety comes beauty.

As for the unity of time he believes that "there is no use in advising that [the action] should take place in the period of one sun, though this is the view of Aristotle; but we lose our respect for him when we mingle tragic style with the humbleness of mean comedy."<sup>27</sup> Lope concludes this argument by advising that the

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

action take place in as little time as possible, except in the case of histories.

Lope offers many technical details which are of interest. He suggests that the author choose his subject and then write it in prose. (This is the same kind of tentative scenario which is suggested by both Aristotle and Horace.) Concerning the division into acts, Lope departs radically from Horace's dictates, and states his preference for a form more familiar to us: "divide the matter into three acts of time, seeing to it, if possible, that in each one the space of the day be not broken."<sup>28</sup> Regarding the custom of three acts, he says that until Captain Virués wrote plays in this form, drama was composed of four acts, "had gone on all fours as on baby's feet," he puts it, then he adds that he wrote plays in that manner himself when he was eleven or twelve years of age.

The business of the first act, Lope contends, is to set forth the case; the second to weave together the events in such a way that until the middle of the third act one may hardly guess the outcome. The "unting of the plot"<sup>29</sup> should not come until the last scene and it should "always trick expectance."<sup>30</sup> This suggestion, it should be noted, is in defiance of Aristotle's advice that "the denouement should arise out of the plot itself and not depend on a stage artifice."<sup>31</sup>

Stage dialogue, Lope insists, should be appropriate to the action, simple words for simple subjects, more elevated diction for persuading, counseling, arguing and the like. "Do not," he cautions, "drag in quotations, nor let your language offend because of exquisite words."<sup>32</sup>

He gives the proper length of a play in concise terms and he shows at the same time one reason why he was able to write so many: "Let each act have but four sheets, for twelve are well suited to the time and the patience of him who is listening."<sup>33</sup> The approxi-

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> Vega Carpio, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

mate time of listening appears to be about two hours, for it is stated in an earlier admonition in which Lope urges that a play be filled with action, "considering that the wrath of a seated Spaniard is immoderate, when in two hours there is not presented to him everything from Genesis to the Last Judgment, I deem it most fitting, if it be for us here to please him, for us to adjust everything so that it succeeds."<sup>34</sup> This two-hour period which is picturesquely described seems to be the span of most entertainments, the length of time which an audience can be expected to watch with pleasure and attention and without exhaustion. The Greek convention of presenting, in the course of a single day, a trilogy plus a satyr play must have been a severe test of the endurance of human pleasure, as is another combinative form of twentieth century cinema which comes to mind.

It is doubtful that any Elizabethan playwright heard or read the lecture of Lope de Vega, but as an expression of the dramatic theories of an eminent sixteenth century dramaturgist it is deeply significant. Lope's words substantiate the supposition that in the sixteenth century mind there was confusion and a lack of differentiation between the dictates of Aristotle and those of his later commentators. Furthermore, his words reveal that lip service only was given to any "Classic Rules." All that was constant were the principles of dramatic construction, and a playwright, to succeed, was expected to cast outworn conventions overboard and follow the "new" art of public demand.

Lope distinguishes clearly between the history of the drama and the business of the theatre. The first he recalls as an academic study; the second, he writes from immediate personal experience. In the latter case the professional hints which he tosses off to aspiring playwrights are not dead theories, but devices vibrant with the living blood of the stage. Such advice, which gives in detail the conventions of the moment, is the kind of specific aid a critic can contribute.

The aim of the chapters which follow is to give practical advice

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

to an Elizabethan, of the type which Lope gave, that is: to require a writer's acceptance of dramatic principles; and to allow him, if he wishes, a respectful glance at conventions of the past; but to insist upon his careful study of the practices of the contemporary theatre.

With this in mind, the first item of advice for the Elizabethan is basic, a principle applicable in any age—that a person must write a play only if he is unhappy not writing it; that once decided, he must turn away from books of theory and write the play, rewrite it, rewrite it again, suffer to have it produced and after suffering through its production, suffer to create another.





## CHAPTER III

# Themes

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### *Drama, an Art with a Purpose*

**T**HE drama has always been dedicated to a purpose, in some eras a more serious one than in others, but nevertheless a purpose. It is usually the combination of teaching and delighting expressed by Aristotle in this manner: "Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation."<sup>1</sup>

More particularly, Aristotle asserts that, comedy, which he promises to define fully in another book, is the "imitation of men worse than average, worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others."<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle's definition of tragedy is more specific and of course is more familiar: "A Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

serious and also has magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories; each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic not a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”<sup>3</sup> As Gilbert Murray says in the preface to the Bywater edition of the *Poetics*, Greek tragedy was originally a ritual performed at the festival of Dionysus, a supplication for the purification of the community from the taints and poisons of the past year, the old contagion of sin and death. According to primitive ideas the mimetic representation on the stage of “incidents arousing pity and fear” acted as a catharsis of such passions or sufferings in real life.

It is obvious from the remarks of Horace that by his time tragedy did not have so high a purpose. Horace makes no attempt to differentiate between the responsibilities of tragedy and comedy, and only says generally that “the poet’s aim is either to profit or please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful.”<sup>4</sup>

Early English drama is more reminiscent of the Greek than of the Roman in its seriousness of purpose. With the former it shared a religious origin, though of course the beliefs of the two eras were widely divergent. In general, Greek tragedy is an imitation of man’s suffering at the hands of cruel gods, the action terminating with a plea for the gods to cease their wanton torture. Elizabethan tragedy is more often an imitation of man’s defiance of God’s benevolent will. The hero’s fall is of his own determination and is wholly deserved. Greek tragedy is a supplication against inescapable fate; Elizabethan tragedy, a warning to choose good rather than evil.

Thomas Heywood’s definition of the purpose of Elizabethan plays is explicit. Plays, he says, “are writ with this aim, and carried with this method, to teach the subjects obedience to their King, to show the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance,

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, p. 54.

dehorting them from all treacherous and felonious stratagems.”<sup>5</sup>

Heywood expatiates upon this statement by describing in some detail the purpose of the various contemporary dramatic forms. Histories, he claims, are directed toward teaching “the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, and instructing such as cannot read in the discovery of all our English Chronicles: and what man have you now of that weak capacity that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay from the landing of Brutus, until this day.”<sup>6</sup>

If we present a Tragedy [he continues] we include the fatal and abominable ends of such as commit notorious murders, which is aggravated and acted with all the art that may be, to terrify men from the like abhorred practices. If we present a foreign History, the subject is so intended, that in the lives of Romans, Grecians or others, either the virtues of our Countrymen are extolled, or their vices reproved, as thus, by the example of Caesar to stir soldiers to valor and magnanimity; by the fall of Pompey, that no man trust in his own strength; we present Alexander killing his friend in a rage to reprove rashness; Midas, choked with his gold, to tax covetousness; Nero, against tyranny; Sardanapalus, against luxury; Nynus, against ambition, with infinite others, by sundry instances, either animating men to noble attempts, or attacking the consciences of the spectators, finding themselves touched in presenting the vices of others.

A morality Heywood defines as an imitation which “persuades men to humanity and good life, instructing them in civility and good manners, showing them the fruits of honesty and the end of villainy.”

Comedy, he says, is something

pleasantly contrived with merry accidents, and intermixed with apt and witty jests, to present before the Prince at certain times of solemnity, or else merrily fitted to the stage. And what is then the subject of this harmless mirth? Either in the shape of a Clown to show others their slovenly and unhandsome behavior that they may reform that simplicity in themselves which others make their sport, lest they hap-

<sup>5</sup> Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, sig. F<sub>3</sub> verso.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. F<sub>3</sub> *et seq.*

pen to become the like subject of general scorn to an auditory, else it treats of love, deriding foolish inamorates who spend their ages, their spirits, nay themselves, in the servile and ridiculous employments of their mistresses; and these are mingled with sportful accidents, to re-create such as of themselves are wholly devoted to Melancholy which corrupts the blood; or to refresh such weary spirits as are tired with labor or study; to moderate the cares and heaviness of the mind, that they may return to their trades and faculties with more zeal and earnestness, after some small, soft and pleasant retirement. Sometimes they discourse of Pantalones, Usurers that have unthrifty sons, which both the fathers and sons may behold to their instruction; sometimes of Courtezans, to divulge their subtleties and snares, in which young men may be entangled, showing them the means to avoid them.

A pastoral has the “use” of showing “the harmless love of Shepherds diversely moralized, distinguishing betwixt the craft of the city and the innocence of the sheep-coat.”

“Briefly,” Heywood concludes, “there is neither Tragedy, History, Comedy, Moral or Pastoral from which an infinite use cannot be gathered. I speak not in defense of any lascivious shows, scurrilous jests or scandalous invectives. If there be any such I banish them quite from my patronage.” These familiar words sound like echoes from Aristotle and Horace, for both claimed, as critics will always justly claim, that pure spectacle, scurrilous or otherwise, can never constitute a play because pure spectacle lacks not only the necessary ingredients of plot and characterization, but also the essential quality of purpose which is under discussion.

According to historic evidence a play must give meaning to its tears or laughter. This eternal quality of meaning in a play may be oppressively moral or gaily imperceptible but it is always present in some form, representing the author’s interpretation of his chosen dramatic theme. The term theme may be defined as the basis of any play, the dominant emotion, such as love, hate, ambition, pride, jealousy, avarice and so on. The chosen emotion is the relentless drive to all action. The author’s point of view is shown by his sympathetic or hostile treatment of the struggle of his hero who

personifies the emotion. The hero's final triumph or defeat, his reward or punishment, is a résumé of the author's purpose.

### *Popular Themes of Tragedy*

#### AMBITION

The two most popular themes in Elizabethan tragedy are ambition and revenge. Revenge was familiar in the classic theatre. All the stories of Orestes and Electra concern the avenging of their father's murder, and the murders of Thyestes' and Polymestor's children are motivated by it. Ambition, however, is an unusual motivation for a Greek tragedy. Polyneices and Eteocles, as they struggle for the domination of Thebes, in the sequel to the story of Oedipus, are no base ambitious upstarts, for each has a real claim to the throne. Jason, in Euripides' *Medea*, stands out as one of the few heroes treated in an unsympathetic manner: his ambition is depicted as unjustified. But Jason is a secondary character in the plot, as the title indicates, and the chief function of his unsympathetic portrayal is to stir compassion for the jealous heroine who exacts a gruesome revenge from her faithless husband. It is interesting to note that Seneca in his later treatment of the story does not think it necessary to characterize Jason harshly.

The Elizabethan ambition play is less indebted to classic tragedy than it is to the Tudor morality. As in the latter type, the theme is commonly illustrated by the story of a man who is blinded and destroyed by his pursuit of material temptations. *Lust's Dominion* (produced in 1600) is a good example of this kind of tragedy. Its villain-hero, Eleazar, is an upstart, a Moorish general, who has given support to the tottering kingdom of Spain. He is not content with the many honors which he has received in return for his services, and he indulges in trickery and murder to gain the end of his ambition, which is the crown of Spain. Like most Elizabethan villain-heroes he achieves success for an instant, then quickly falls, victim of both a fatal flaw and of persistent adversaries.

Sometimes in tragedies of ambition built on the morality theme

one notes the mingling of classic elements. There is a mixture of classic and morality influences in the tragedy of *Alaham* by the talented courtier Fulke Greville, which was first produced in 1600. Greville employs the Medea and Hercules stories and attempts to conform rigidly to the rules of time, place, and action. He strictly limits the number of characters (there are rarely more than two indicated as being on the stage at the same time). He scrupulously avoids violent on-stage action. But at the same time, his personification of the hero, Alaham, the murderously grasping second son, is distinctly unclassical. So, also, is his inclusion of the Cain story, as well as his addition to the chorus of such medieval figures as Malice, Craft, and Pride.

Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* which was produced in 1603 is another example of the mixed influence of classic tragedy and the morality play. Like Greville, Jonson tried consciously to imitate the conventions of the first, but from time to time, like Greville, he betrayed unconsciously the influence of the second. He chose, for instance, the same theme of ambition which was an Elizabethan and not a classic favorite. Self-made Sejanus, "the now court god" of Rome, aspires like the many other contemporary villain-heroes to more than his post of "chiefest helper":

. . . great and high  
The world knows only two, that's Rome and I  
. . .

And, at each step, I feel my advanced head  
Knock out a star in heaven.<sup>7</sup>

The fall of this typical Elizabethan upstart, despite Jonson's frenzied attempts to give his death and dismemberment the horror of the fate of Seneca's Hippolytus, remains satiric. It arouses no pity and gives no relief of catharsis. Jonson's constant emphasis upon the satiric elements of his story makes one question whether in calling the play a tragedy he is not defying from the start the classic definition of the form.

<sup>7</sup> Jonson, *Sejanus, His Fall*, sig. K.

## REVENGE

Revenge, the other popular theme of Elizabethan tragedy, lent itself more easily to a strict classical interpretation; but, paradoxically, the conscious imitators of the ancients were not the ones who developed the possibilities of this theme as much as the writers of melodrama who had no desire to follow classic conventions.

Among the various interpretations of the theme, *The Noble Soldier*, by Rowley, which was produced sometime between 1602 and 1623, is an example of the most moderate type. In this play there is no murder to be avenged. The hero, the noble soldier described in the title, is not caught in the net of action but is an impersonal agent who wishes to see justice done. At the time he appears in the court of Spain, the King has for some time been married to the daughter of the Duke of Florence, but at that moment he promises Onaelia, his jilted fiancée, that he will raise her and their bastard son to power. When this promise is not kept, a tangled situation results; for Onaelia employs the Noble Soldier to kill the King, and the King employs him to kill Onaelia. The Noble Soldier, however, is able to outwit both employers, and by conventional devices which will be studied later, he succeeds in revenging wrong and establishing right.

The play loses effectiveness through the aloofness of its hero from the passions which motivate the action. The author is unable to evoke the emotional intensity that would have been possible if he had shown the Noble Soldier helplessly trapped in the plot. Consider how different the situation is in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (produced 1599-1601). Hamlet seeks to avenge the murder of his father, the human being closest to him both in bonds of affection and in blood. Those against whom he directs his vengeance are the two people who hold the greatest power over him and are his closest relatives. Every move which Hamlet makes to avenge the murder is shown as a direct blow against his own fortunes and his own life. It is the poignant characterization of this trapped hero, together with the brilliant characterizations of those in conflict with him,

that sublimate the melodramatic plot of *Hamlet* into one of the greatest tragedies of human emotion.

Henry Chettle's *Hoffman* (produced 1602-1603) gives obvious testimony to the popularity of the revenge play in general and to *Hamlet* in particular. Like Hamlet, Hoffman plots to avenge the murder of his father, but unlike Hamlet, Hoffman is not shown in sympathetic relation to his father; he is depicted as a soulless villain and it is difficult to find any moral justification for his program of revenge. Neither Hoffman nor any other character in the tragedy is capable of stirring the emotions traditionally evoked by the characters in *Hamlet*, because the characters are created for action alone and not feeling. What *Hoffman* offers is a generous display of Senecan horrors. It is an exaggerated melodrama in the tradition of Kyd, so overdrawn that it comes dangerously close (as it probably did, even in Elizabethan days) to bathos. *fall from sub* <sub>rid</sub>

Though Chettle wished his tragedy to be taken seriously, there are certain other plays dealing with tragic events in which the action is intentionally burlesqued. An illustration of this negative approach is *Jeronimo I* (produced 1600-1605), an adaptation of *The Spanish Tragedy*. In it, the old plot has been subjected to the strong influence of low comedy in both action and characterization, in the latter instance most notably in the role of Jeronimo. The character who changes abruptly is not uncommon in Elizabethan plays, and the subject is treated at more length in the next chapter, but Jeronimo's case is extreme for he begins as a dignitary and ends as a clown. The play must have been, and still would be stirring because of the vehemence of dramatic action, but Jeronimo's complete lack of heroic stature precludes it from being taken seriously as tragedy.

We may say then, that a writer of an Elizabethan tragedy would be most likely to produce a successful play if he chose as his theme either ambition or revenge. The choice would be wise, for both themes had proved to be popular, and the quarry of subjects illustrating their action was known to be rich. Though the moral of his tragedy should be the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue, the playwright could exercise considerable freedom in his choice of

the crimes and of his treatment of them. He might adopt the so-called classic form of pure tragedy with its emphasis upon terror; the newer interpretation of romantic tragedy with its dangerous but fascinating emphasis upon pity; or the satiric treatment of tragedy which rendered it burlesque. A wise writer should be cognizant of the perils inherent in the latter interpretations, for though the inclusion of some melodrama and comedy in tragedy can be natural and effective if handled with discrimination, if it is not, the method can be destructive of the emotions that tragic action should arouse. Despite his independent Elizabethan spirit, the aspiring playwright should not forget the sound classic admonition to beware of exaggerated horrors.

### *Tragic Histories Share the Same Themes*

Tragic histories are closely related to tragedy and the same themes would be the wisest to suggest to an aspiring playwright. One notes that these plays also reflect the popular variations of romantic or melodramatic or satiric interpretation.

*The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt* by Dekker and Webster (produced 1602-1607) is an example of the romantic type. The title of this play is misleading since it concerns only the secondary plot, the uprising of a patriotic young Catholic, Sir Thomas Wyatt, who has defended the succession of Queen Mary but will not brook "the coming in of King Philip," an event promised in the play's subtitle. The main action concerns the pathetic story of Lady Jane Grey and her husband Guilford Lord Dudley (whose historical personality is whitewashed until he appears as a perfect Romeo). The two are shown as the victims of the overweening ambition of their respective fathers the Duke of Suffolk and the Duke of Northumberland. Forced to take the crown, Dudley says helplessly (scene 2) "Lo, we ascend unto our chairs of state like funeral coffins." The emphasis throughout is upon the tragic careers of these star-crossed lovers who in the end lose their lives.

The anonymous play of *Charlemagne* (produced 1584-1605)

is another example of romanticized historical incident. In this tragedy the perfidious ambition of Ganelon holds second place to the strange, morbid, actually moribund love of Charlemagne. The emperor is shown as doddering and senile and mad with love for his young queen who has just died. "Love reigns in him," it is said, "above wonder, nay above the account of learning or experience." His dead queen is brought upon the stage. According to the directions, "They place ye dead bodie in a chair," "he sits by her," "soft music," "he sleeps on her bosom." In the creation of this strange business the author was probably influenced by the story current at the time which told of the odd ceremonies performed for Henry of France's mistress, Gabrielle d'Estrées, whose body was placed upon her bed and meals served to it for four days.<sup>8</sup> However, the author seems to have considered this historical parallel insufficient justification for the Emperor's unnatural behavior, for he has reinforced its authority with the naive device of a "magic ring," the wearer of which instantly inspires the love of Charlemagne. In this way he accounts for both the macabre love scene with the queen and the burlesqued love scene with Bishop Turpin. The play is an early example, and an eloquent warning, of the dangers attendant upon an author's indulgence in gross sentimentality.

The tragic history of *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1592-1602) is illustrative of a different trend in interpretation. The play is a tragedy only in that the hero's death according to the facts of history is known to be tragic. Though the theme chosen is appropriate to tragedy, being ambition, this emotion is shown to dominate Cromwell only in the author's mind and not in Cromwell's action. Cromwell is introduced as a mild youth preoccupied with the reading of books. The apprentices in his father's blacksmith shop shake their heads over him, deplored his studiousness. "I do verily think," one says, "he'll read himself out of his wits." When Cromwell appears on the stage he confirms this fear:

My books are all the wealth I do possess  
And unto them I have engaged my heart

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Venetian Ambassador, April 25, 1599.

## THEMES

Oh learning, how divine thou seems't to me  
 Within whose arms is all felicity.<sup>9</sup>

Cromwell's patient father explains that " 'Twas his Mother's doing. To send him to the University."

The gently satiric characterization of Cromwell continues, depicting him as quiet and bookish and a paragon of honesty. The action progresses easily and humorously toward the incongruous but inescapable last scenes of history. One realizes at the moment of this obligatory action that the author has failed in making his hero conform to the dictates of his theme, for, in a play where the dominant emotion is conceded to be ambition, it is assumed that the hero must possess sufficient stature to fulfill his destiny. *Thomas Lord Cromwell* is an example of an anomalous play which claims to be tragedy but in execution is closer to comedy.

A different type of history play is represented by the anonymous *Alarum for London* (1598-1600). In this, the entire action is concerned with the siege of Antwerp by the Spaniards, which event occurred in 1576. The bleeding fall of Antwerp, whose vice had been soft and luxury-loving indolence, it is hoped will serve as an alarm for London, a city which the author believes exhibits many of the same dangerous tendencies. The theme is war, and the story is the destruction of a whole community.

In the slothful city of Antwerp no valiant lord or warrior arises as a hero to defend his home, only Stump comes forth, a poor, despised, ill-treated, disillusioned veteran of the last war, with one leg and a wooden stump, as his name implies. Early in the action he rails against the indignities to which he is subject:

But let a soldier who has spent his blood  
 Is lam'd, diseas'd, or any way distrest  
 Appeal for succor, then you look askance  
 As if you knew him not, respecting more  
 An ostler, or some drudge that rakes your kennels  
 Than one that fightest for the common wealth.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, sig. A2 verso.

<sup>10</sup> *A Larum for London*, sig. C2 verso.

It is Stump alone who rises to fight for his city. The scenes are episodic, brief moments of horror and pathos: the looting and dividing of spoils, the torture of an old citizen, the murder of two children, the rape of a burgher's wife. This type of documentary reporting is effective and the simple realism of many of the scenes is suggestive of a technique popular in the twentieth century.

So far as advice for writing a "Tragic History" in 1600-1605 is concerned, a realistic critic would be forced to admit in view of the evidence that none were then being written which could equal those produced in the nineties: Peele's *Edward I* (1590-1593), Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (1590-1593), Marlowe's *Edward II* (1591-1593), Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1592-1597), *Richard II* (1594-1595), *King John* (1591-1598), and the two parts of *Henry IV* (1596-1598). Those plays had in general followed the routine purposes of teaching the lessons conveyed in the great chronicles of England and of pointing out the fearful retribution which awaited rebellious subjects and evil kings. Perhaps by 1600 playwrights were eager to diversify or elaborate upon the conventional structure of these stories, and so attempted comic and satiric and romantic interpretations of history, with an emphasis upon unusual characterization and unusual incident. Whatever the reason, the pure history play had lost its vogue, and it would be only fair to counsel the aspiring writer that he would be wiser to try either tragedy or comedy.

### *Popular Themes in Comedy*

#### HARMLESS MERRIMENT

Comedy would doubtless be the safest choice. It always is. As for a good theme, there were many at hand such as "love," "prodigality," "patience," or the nebulous motivation for action termed "harmless merriment." There are numerous examples of this last which resemble the present musical comedy in that they contain a little exemplum, a little plot, usually a little satire (most often in characterization), and a great many pleasurable accessories. *Jack*

*Drum's Entertainment* (produced in 1600) is one of these gay pieces in which certain old jokes are retold and certain fragments of well-worn plots are repeated, amid feasting, music, song, and dance.

Marston's *What You Will* (1601) is another such unpretentious play, set in the genial environment of eating, drinking, and love-making. A long-lost husband, who is a combination of Ulysses and Amphitryon, returns to this setting, and after enduring tests which are variations of those that tried these heroes, he succeeds in winning back his flirtatious and much less worthy wife.

Chapman's *May Day* (1601-1609) frankly states that it is concerned with nothing more than a day of gay carousing, during the course of which the gulls are gulled and the ladies loved. In the end indulgence is sought for all irregularities and the company marches off in high spirits.

Free love and lechery are subjects for stock tirades of satire, but their treatment in Middleton's *The Family of Love* (1602-1607) is merry and uncritical. Middleton himself calls the play a bit of "harmless mirth," and is obviously interested in the pleasure and the amusement of the spectator, giving him an eye-filling, racy, human, and openhearted reporting, not one of Jonson's moral lectures.

Dekker and Webster proclaim in the text of *Westward Ho!* (1604) that this play is nothing more than an excursion of "harmless merriment." Its satire lies mainly in the characterizations, notably of the heroines, the merchants' wives, of whom the authors say "you city dames . . . are indeed the fittest and most proper persons for Comedy." These light-hearted ladies are involved in spirited banter and several embarrassing situations, though little plot. They simply go westward ho from London, to the "light town" of Brainford: "They came to Brainford to be merry, they were caught in Birdlime; and therefore set the Hares-head against the Goose-giblets, put all instruments in tune, and every husband play music upon the lips of his wife."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Dekker and Webster, *Westward Hoe*, sig. 12.

A happy ending occurs when the husbands (who are also good subjects for satire) retrieve their spouses, "fantastic and light-headed to the eye as feather-makers, but [a nice pun] pure about the heart as if we dwelt amongst 'em in the Blackfriars." In this play the ending differs from the purge of satire, for the erring wives are not "beaten off the stage"; instead, Justiniano, the leader of the husbands, merely says "What a glory . . . to kiss your wives like forgetful husbands, to exhort and forgive the young men like pitiful fathers; then to call for oars, then to cry hey! for London, then to make Supper, then to drown all in Sack and Sugar, then to go to bed, and then to rise and open Shop."<sup>12</sup> This jolly and practical advice serves for both those on stage and those in the audience. It is wholly in accord with the precept of Heywood earlier mentioned, that of moderating "the cares and heaviness of the mind, that all may return to their trades and faculties with more zeal and earnestness, after some small, soft and pleasant retirement."

#### LOVE

The emotion of love has always held a dominant position in comedy as well as in tragedy, and the love-chase, for instance, which was absorbing to the Roman audience, continued to delight the Elizabethan audience. As with all the other genre discussed, a comedy of love could be treated romantically, realistically, satirically, or farcically.

An example of one of the most romantic love-chases is the charming, slight and airy *Maid's Metamorphosis* (1599-1600), a play in the tradition of Lyl. In a pastoral setting, Eurymine, an innocent, young and beautiful maid is shown sorely tried before she is captured by Ascanio, who is also young and beautiful. Eurymine escapes death through a sympathetic ruse which is suggested by her half-hearted assassins, and thereafter she is chased not only by the lovesick Ascanio, but also by the interested god Apollo whose touch she avoids by pleading to be metamorphosed into a boy. This

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. H3 verso.

transformation complicates her reunion with her true love, but in the end Apollo sportingly returns her to her proper sex so that the lovers may be united.

*The Thracian Wonder* (1590-1600) is another play written in the romantic and pastoral tradition. Not love alone, but many other wonders are leisurely pursued and ultimately enjoyed. When King Pheander of Thrace hears of what he believes to be a most unseemly alliance of his daughter, he banishes her and her infant child. They are put into a little boat and cast into the sea. The convention of shipwreck, separation, and rescue follow. Then a considerable time passes. At one place in the text it says twenty years, and in another forty, but the former is more likely if the audience is to believe that Ariadne is as lithe and beautiful in the end as she was in the beginning. For when her son meets her at a festival he is quickened by a mysterious affection as he stares upon her loveliness. Another stranger reacts in exactly the same manner (her long-banished husband). In the end, in an atmosphere of vernal gaiety, all are reunited and Ariadne is reinstated by Pheander, her father. This play is interesting as an example of all the ludicrous exaggerations of the technique of Elizabethan romance cried out upon by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Apologie for Poetrie*.

*Twelfth Night* (1600) dramatizes both a romanticized and a satirized love-chase. As is well known, the secondary plot, Malvolio's presumptuous wooing of Olivia, was so much applauded that the bumbling steward became the most popular character in the play. Indeed in the eighteenth century some productions of the comedy were billed in his name.

The influence of Malvolio is apparent in Chapman's comedy of *The Gentleman Usher* (1602-1604). The play's title is inspired by the doltish steward, a secondary character in the plot. The action involves a triangular love-chase or "the hunting of the heart." Chapman states this symbolically in the first scene by showing the old Duke setting forth for the chase. It appears that the Duke and his young son both love the beautiful Lady Margaret, and because of this unfortunate situation, Basolio, the gentleman usher in Lady

Margaret's house, is drawn into the plot and made to act as a go-between for the young lovers, who of course triumph in spite of his blunders.

The character who attempts to arrange action rather than participate in it has been noted in other instances, and he is often found in love-chase stories. The Merry Devil of Edmonton, for example, is a Cambridge don, an interested spectator who attempts to further the love-chase of a former pupil. The don's personal story, of far more importance than the love-chase, is limited to the prologue and the first scene. The play itself appears to represent the first of several adventures which the Merry Devil is scheduled to enjoy before his recall to hell. In this case he enjoys the adventure as an onlooker.

A variation in the structure of a love-chase comedy is the group quest, a version common both to romance and satire. Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London* (1592-1600) is a romantic interpretation of history with an emphasis upon sterling feats of arms. It is a play with a group hero, namely, the old Duke of Bullen, his four sons, and his daughter. Freely and picturesquely the whole family wander over the face of Europe where, thanks to miraculous shipwrecks, separations, disguises, and false encounters, they manage to live and fight among themselves until, at last, the discoveries of identity are made in the nick of time. All the children have bettered their conditions during their travels, in fact, they have affected conquests of the heart, so that in the end the old Duke is able to see his daughter a princess, "and his four sons all kings."

*The Wit of a Woman* (c. 1604) bears a singular title which is misleading, for it, too, dramatizes a group hunting of the heart. Four old widower-fathers each have a boy and a girl. Each girl loves a boy, but each father also loves a girl, and since all names end in "io" and "ia" even the author gives up any attempt at distinguishing between individuals after a scene or two. But, as anyone could guess, the girls are successful in securing the money of the fathers and the hearts of the sons, and the author concludes by

saying age should take this gulling in good grace for all “was merry sport without hurt meant.”

Love, any playwright should remember, leads the list of themes for comedy and probably always will.

#### “GULLING” AND “GUILING”

Gulling as a fine art was extremely popular in Elizabethan comedy. As a dramatic device it held an important place in almost every play, and in many it controlled the action. This is true of Shakespeare’s *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1598–1602), where the chief business is the gulling of Falstaff. This progresses from his humiliation at being forced to hide in a basket of dirty linen, to the worse consequence of being ducked with it in water, to his being dressed in women’s clothes, and finally to his ridiculous disguise as Herne, which results in his being bruised and trampled on and singed with tapers. When he finally calls for quarter and admits “I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass,” the play is over; for Master Page says expansively, with that true sense of British sportsmanship: “Yet be cheerful knight, thou shalt eat a posset tonight at my house where I will desire thee to laugh at my wife that now laughs at thee.” And so the company departs.

*Sir Giles Goosecap* (1601–1603), a play possibly by Chapman, has little more plot than the fooling of three foolish knights—Sir Giles, Sir Cuthbert Rudsby, and Captain Foulweather—who go “a-courting.” They are entertainingly doltish and are expertly gulled until the last scene when something goes wrong, and the author, in a moment of inconsistent romantic fervor, lets the superior ladies decide to marry these knights. Only the “emphatical” Foulweather is left out, and that is only because there are not enough ladies to go around.

There is a distinction which must be clearly understood between “gulling,” which implies that one dull man or group is fooled by a man or men of wit, and “guiling,” which supposes that both parties are shrewd and that the contest is equal, a veritable battle of wits.

In Chapman's play of *All Fools* (1599-1604) there are both gulls and guilers, in fact, as the author says, "here's gull for gull and wits at war with wits." The master wit, Rinaldo, even creates the plot, which is no mean achievement. This young man from the university is able to make a fool out of anybody, though it must be said that he concentrates most of his attention upon avaricious old Gostanzo in whose house he arranges that the younger generation live gaily in an apparent state of mixed marriage. "Whose wife is Gratiana, now, I pray?" asks a puzzled father in Act V. It is all, as the author says, "an excellent ground to sow the seed of mirth amongst us."

*Wily Beguiled* (1596-1606) is another contest of wits, and as its title implies is the old story of "the trickster tricked." Gripe, the usurer, lays evil plans to force his daughter Lelia to marry Churms, "the pettifogging lawyer" who has a "buttermilk face" and walks as "stately as a great baboon," but he underestimates the strength of her other suitor, the poor young scholar, Sophos, who is "o'er worn with love" for Lelia and also endowed with the ingenuity which is sometimes shown to be one of the benefits of a university education. With "tricks of love" and "a little logic and pitome colloquim," Sophos is able "to make a wench do anything"; while with tricks of another nature, he is able to make a gull out of Gripe and a goose out of Churms, so that all ends properly.

John Day's comedy entitled *Law Tricks* (1604-1607) shows practically all the cast up to some kind of guile: Lurdos, the avaricious old lawyer, who has "scraped gentility out of attorney's fees" believes that he has divorced his wife; Horatio, the covetous politician, believes that he has killed her; Polymetes, the son of the Duke, "a parlous youth, sharp and satirical," believes that he has established a sound reputation and that his wild debauchery is not known. Emilia, the Duke's eighteen-year-old daughter, however, is the shrewdest of the lot, and she plays "will of the wisp" with them all, discovering the truth and rendering judgment to each, according to his deserts.

Wit as a mark of character is seen steadily gaining in favor,

though it is essentially the wit of action, not the wit of conversation familiar to Restoration comedy. Wit, as something instinctive and inspired, is often shown in contrast to craft or guile, which is considered a studied and tortuous cunning, one bearing the pressure of unfair advantage.

This quality of craft is a serviceable theme for several comedies. In Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1604-1606) the vice is personified by Quomodo who lusts for land. He puts his desires into picturesque form by saying: "Oh that sweet, neat, comely, proper delicate parcel of land! Like a fine gentlewoman i' the waist, not so great as pretty, pretty: the trees in summer whistling, the silver waters by the banks, harmoniously gliding. I should have been a scholar: an excellent place for a student."<sup>18</sup> After unscrupulous machinations Quomodo succeeds in removing the specified parcel of land from "free-breasted" Master Easy, "a pure, fresh gull" from Essex. But Quomodo carries his deceptions one step too far by pretending to be dead in order to test the loyalty of his wife and heirs. They, unfortunately, are no sorrier to see the coffin carried out than any of the other mourners. When Quomodo rises in fury and upbraids his wife, he finds it impossible to prove his existence, and he is forced to see both the property—and his wife—go into the hands of Master Easy.

In the search either for a major or for a minor plot, a dramatist would do well to consider the well-explored possibilities of gulling and guiling, for the witty who prey on the witless, and the witty who battle with wits or outwit themselves will always be rich sources for comedy.

#### PRODIGALITY

Prodigality would be another theme worth considering for a comedy. The adventures of a conscienceless spendthrift whose career was reminiscent of that of the Prodigal Son of the Bible story and the morality play made an instant appeal to a Jacobean audience. In fact, from the time of the adaptation of the early Ger-

<sup>18</sup> Middleton, *Michaelmas Terme*, sig. E4, verso.

man play, *Acolastus* (1540) the vogue of the prodigal hero seemed to have increased steadily in the English theatre until his heyday in the Restoration.

*The Good Wife* (1601-1602) is an example of this type of "pleasantly conceited Comedy." The hero, young Master Arthur, is a "riotous husband" whose "ranging pleasures love variety." The object of his fancy at the moment is Mary, the courtezan, for whom he deserts his good wife. This Mistress Arthur is a loving "wonder of women." Someone once asks young Arthur, "What is your wife, a woman or a saint?" Her story follows the formula of "the testing of patience" which will be discussed in a moment. The patient character, as will be seen, is a common foil for the profligate.

Young Chartley (these prodigals are frequently called "young Master So-and-So") is the hero of Heywood's *Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (1604). This young rake, married to one Lucy and betrothed to a second Lucy, suddenly casts his eyes upon Gratiana and exclaims: "'Tis a pretty wench, a very pretty wench, nay, a very, very, very pretty wench. But what a rogue am I, for a married man? Nay, that have not been married these six hours, and to have my shittle-wits run a wool-gathering already."<sup>14</sup> So wild are the oats which Young Chartley proceeds to sow that it takes a witch to discover a solution to his problems. This benefactress, the Wise-Woman, who is named in the title, follows the tradition of the aloof manipulator of the plot, the observer, who is able to expedite matters without becoming emotionally involved.

The hero of *The London Prodigal* (1603-1605) is Young Flowerdale, again the typical rake, "all air, light as a feather, changing as the wind." He also woos and wins a Lucy, but instantly casts her off, departing with her dowry to enjoy the greater pleasures of debauchery. True to type, Lucy, a model of patience and faith, struggles throughout the play to reclaim her wayward husband. The action concludes with the usual reform of the rake, a repentance which, though hard to believe, is nevertheless the stock conclusion of these plays. Young Flowerdale, in this case, suddenly says:

<sup>14</sup> Heywood, *The Wise-Woman of Hogsdon*, sig. E2.

## THEMES

. . . wonder among wives  
 Thy chastity and virtue has infused  
 Another soul in me.<sup>15</sup>

Satisfied with this assertion of reform Lucy at once takes him back, and all march off to celebrate their reunion.

Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1603-1604) is not solely the story of a rake's progress but a study of group prodigality. For some time it appears that out of many characters, only the stern and icy Angelo, whose "blood is very snow broth," has not surrendered to sexual indulgence. However, it soon becomes apparent that this is not true, for Angelo is plotting to corrupt Isabella, as chaste and persuasive and poetic as any heroine in Shakespeare's romances. She is in fact so convincing in her characterization that she sets satire and romance at odds. The result of this conflict gives *Measure for Measure* neither the rowdy buoyance of plays which record immorality uncritically nor the bitter scorn of single-minded satire. Shakespeare, it would seem, tried to write the story of the prodigal according to the satiric pattern of the day, but his irrepressible romantic spirit, his "brave notions and gentle expressions wherein he flowed with such facility" could not prevent his tempering it with romance.

A variant of the rake's progress, the fall of a woman, had obvious attractive possibilities. Shakespeare, in *Troilus and Cressida*, was one of the authors who treated the theme. By the time the play was produced, sometime between 1601 and 1603, the two title characters had already undergone many forms of satiric treatment and Cressida had become a symbol of wantonness just as Troilus had become a symbol of sensuality. Shakespeare did not intend that *Troilus and Cressida* should evoke sympathy or pity; it was meant for straight satire. This intention was undoubtedly prompted, as it was in *Measure for Measure*, by his desire to try the form which was so much in vogue. He sought to entertain his audience with a lively argument on politics and the faithlessness

<sup>15</sup> *The London Prodigall*, sig. G3.

of women. Probably the reason why *Troilus and Cressida* has proven puzzling to later readers is that they have wrongly insisted upon a romantic interpretation of the relationship of the pair because of the notion that Shakespeare was too "gentle" to write satire.

The story of a woman's faithlessness treated realistically and sympathetically becomes tragedy. An interesting example of this is Heywood's *Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603). The story of Mistress Frankford's fall is totally different from the routine stories of husbands' falls. She is not shown to be generally susceptible to all men, as it is assumed that all husbands are to "pretty faces." She is tempted only once and yields with anticipation of little but the remorse which promptly begins to torture her. Her contrition is lengthy in contrast to the traditional husband's, who, if he recognizes his error at all, does so in the last few lines. In his case a slight apology is considered sufficient provocation for his wife's forgiveness and a happy reacceptance by society in general. This is not true with a faithless wife, though her repentance, unlike a husband's, is sincere. She is not forgiven and not reaccepted, and she usually dies by her husband's hand. In Heywood's play the notion of having the wife die because of her husband's kindness in rendering a light punishment is an inspired bit of irony, one he must have been conscious of since he capitalized upon it in the title.)

#### PATIENCE

Patience, as well as being the conventional foil for prodigality, can also serve as the dominant emotion in either a main or secondary plot. When the emphasis is thus changed the patient individual becomes the leading character and the testing of his patience becomes the chief concern of the action. The personifications of humility are found to be the familiar "patient maid" or "wife," the "patient husband" or the "meek man." Romantic interpretations of patience are found in such plays as *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green* (1600) and *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (1599-1600); in

both of these, "the weak, long thrust unto the wall," are finally vindicated, rewarded, and revenged.

The patience of Candido, the meek little linen draper, is tested to the breaking point in one of the minor plots in *The Honest Whore* (1604). He lets his best bolt of lawn be cut in the center so that certain noisy gallants may have a single penny piece; he allows his finest gold and silver beaker to be filched by these same gallants without uttering a word; he lets his wife be cozened under his nose; he goes to a senate meeting dressed in a carpet with a hole in the middle for his head, rather than annoy his wife by demanding the key to the clothes closet; he finally goes to Bedlam (probably with relief). At this point it is revealed that Viola, the wife, has always loved Candido and that she has harassed him only in an attempt to see if she could make him impatient. She has not succeeded, and apparently between Acts IV and V she determines to reveal her true feeling. When she reappears she does everything in her power to extricate Candido from the madhouse. It is interesting to note that this male paragon of patience, upon the conclusion of his final test of spirit, does not joyously return to his spouse's arms as wives are wont to do. He stands aloof and ends the play with a dignified and bitter discourse upon the quality of "Patience."

Griselda was undoubtedly the most patient heroine of romance. The attractive story of her sufferings had been treated by Boccaccio, Petrarch, Chaucer and Thomas Deloney before the dramatization of *Patient Grissell* by Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton in 1600. According to tradition, the humble and beautiful maid is wooed and wed by the Marquis of Saluces. The marriage seems a happy one, until suddenly, without provocation, Grissell is sent packing from the palace. She is robbed of her children, informed of their "death," and finally ordered to place her crown on the head of her husband's new "bride," place her slippers on the "bride's" feet and her wedding ring on the "bride's" finger. To all these trials the saintly Grissell submits, and after the final humiliation, the Marquis throws off the person who has played the part of the "bride" and confesses to Grissell and the assembled company that all the

elaborate trials, including the feigned death of Grissell's children have been directed by him to test her patience. To this virtue, he gives the tardy praise, "Our joys are now complete, forward to the feast. Patience hath won the prize and now is blest, . . . and in a book of fame, all worlds in gold shall register her name."<sup>16</sup>

As is to be expected, in patience plays contrasts to patience are personified in the subplots. In *Patient Grissell* there is a termagant widow, Gwenthyan, who reduces to an abject state the blustering Welsh knight, Sir Owen. And, in contrast to Gwenthyan's peevishness and Grissell's patience, there is a wily virgin, Julia, who is convinced that "it is best to live in freedom and love it, better to die a maid and lead apes in hell than live a wife and be continually in hell."<sup>17</sup>

Thomas Heywood's *The Royal King and Loyal Subject* (1602–1618) also treats the theme of patience in a romantic spirit. This time it is Gaston, the King's marshal and most "loyal subject" who is tried. Unlike Grissell, who is first seen raised from a humble state and then cast down into even greater misery, Gaston appears, when the action begins, as the favorite of the King. His love for the monarch is displayed with such excess that other courtiers are made jealous and fearful. When the King's horse throws a shoe in a hunt, Gaston rips off a shoe from his own mount to replace it; and when a tournament is held, Gaston forfeits the prize to the Prince whose victory he knows will please the King. The nervous courtiers are quick to tell the King that such "courtesy is all ambition" and they prevail upon him to banish the marshal from court. Gaston accepts this hard sentence with good grace and retires to the country. He is not left in peace. The routine tests of patience begin, and they are climaxed in the seizure of his daughters and his trial on the scaffold. Gaston quietly yields to all regal requests, though it must be admitted that his life is saved and his position restored in the end, not through his patience, but through a little craft in which he has been indulging upon the side.

<sup>16</sup> Chettle, Haughton, and Dekker, *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill*, sig. L.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. D.

Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (1601-1603) is a comedy of patience combined with the love-chase and, though the treatment is predominantly romantic, certain characters and situations are decidedly satiric. Helena derives as little satisfaction from her marriage to the wild and wandering Bertram as did Grissell from hers to the Marquis. However, in Bertram's defense it must be said that the marriage was not of his own making. He did not tempt her into it with false promises and then desert her; he was forced to marry her and, since he never showed her any affection, his desertion is less cruel. It is only by Helena's tireless and romantic devotion to what appears a lost cause that in the end she wins him. She employs all the conventional resources—disguise, pilgrimage, deception, and riddling—and in the end Bertram surrenders, inspired, as is conventional, by sudden and ardent love.

In the anonymous play *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1603-1604), another patient and persistent heroine is shown, this time in a more realistic setting. The Fair Maid, Anabel, loves Vallenger at first sight, which is unfortunate because he is a familiar type, the unregenerate rake. From the moment of their meeting the story is the old struggle of prodigality and patience. The wedding feast is still in progress when Vallenger switches his affections to a courtezan. When Anabel is unfortunate enough to discover her groom with this bold creature, the stock scene of Grissell's final humiliation is repeated with embellishment. Anabel is forced to strip off her wedding gown and costly jewels and dress Florence in them. This she does, not only adding her spontaneous blessing but an earnest plea to Florence to be kind to Vallenger. Anabel resembles certain other patient heroines in that she forgives her husband in a later scene for attempting to poison her, and in the climax of the play she risks everything to defend him. When, in the end, Vallenger makes a sudden though conventional repentance, Anabel, equally according to convention, receives him in her arms, and all the company are asked to go forth and celebrate "some sportful hours."

The same prodigality and patience theme is treated by Marston in his bitter satire *The Dutch Courtezan*, which was produced either

in 1603 or 1604. There are the usual types: the patient Beatrice, the prodigal young Freevil, and the heartless courtezan Franceschina. Marston appears to be particularly interested in the last character, as the title indicates, and he delights in making the story of this "punk rampant" a satire on the tragedy of revenge. She defines her purpose like an angry hero of that type of play:

. . . now does my heart swell high, for my revenge  
 Has birth and form, first friend sal kill his friend  
 He dat survives, I'll hang besides. De  
 Chaste Beatrice I'll vex. Only de ring  
 Dat got de world sal know de worst of evils  
 Woman corrupted is de worst of devils.<sup>18</sup>

Lest this ambitious plot should not prove sufficient to hold the audience's attention, Marston adds considerable extraneous matter, "intermixing" the story, he says, with "the deceits of a witty city jester." Padding of this nature, it must be admitted in passing, was a general and approved practice.

*Grim the Collier and His Dame* (1600) is one of the most ingenious of the patience plays, for in this case it is the Devil himself who is tested in the crucible of marriage. The first scene shows the ghost of a desperate husband (who has just committed suicide) being hailed before a tribunal of devils. He explains that the reason for his suicide was that he could not endure marriage. So piteous is his testimony that the devils' sympathy is aroused, and they decide, before sending Malbecco's ghost to hell's eternal fires, that they will elect a devil to go to earth and test women and marriage for a year. And in case the reader is curious about the outcome, the report brought back in the final scene is that "marriage 's a thousand torments worse for us devils than hell for men."

Patience, one cannot fail to observe, serves not only as an excellent supporting or contrasting emotion but also as an eminently satisfactory central theme. It is one which appears to offer an opportunity either for romantic or satiric interpretation. The choice between these alternatives seems often, though not always, to de-

<sup>18</sup> Marston, *The Dutch Courtezan*, sig. D.

pend upon whether the patient character is a woman or a man, for in a woman patience is considered a strong virtue, one which is easy to romanticize; whereas in an active man patience is apt to be considered a form of weakness rather than of strength, and therefore a good subject for comedy or satire.

### *The Theme of Satire: Exposure of Vice and Folly*

The scrutiny of integrity, the testing of virtue like the testing of patience, and the exposure of vice are corollary actions which, though they can be the basis of a romantic story, are most important as the foundation of satire. As Jonson clearly saw, the purpose of satire was to expose human folly, inconsistency, and hypocrisy. By scrutinizing the commonwealth and its inhabitants, the common and uncommon man, and by exposing bad government, bad morals, bad taste, and bad character and by shocking and shaming men, evils could be reformed.

There is no doubt that Jonson's interest in dramatic satire and his brilliant support of the form contributed to the establishment of its vogue. In *Cynthia's Revels* (1600-1601) he studies and passes judgment on the absurdities of court manners. He ridicules courtly affectations, the grotesque language of the courtiers, their extravagant compliments and oaths, their ridiculous pastimes, their inane repartee, their vapid music, their idiotic games, their absurd courting, their false-chivalrous dueling ("quarreling by the book" as Shakespeare puts it). Jonson satirizes the whole code of chivalry and, having done this in general terms, he then takes up such specific subjects as the arrogant treatment of scholars by men of fashion, the insolent conduct of gallants in the theatre, their base resorts, the schools of dandyism, ordinaries, stews—on and on according to Jonson's unrelenting method. *Cynthia's Revels* is in the author's own words "an appeal from bad taste in fashion to the sovereign authority of good taste and to the judgment of an unprejudiced audience." The plot is only incidental, and it is so elusive that no eye (perhaps even Jonson's) has ever been able to trace it. It is

buried beneath the characters. They in turn are buried beneath the dialogue. And the last is so brilliant one gives up the quest.

*Satiromastix; or, The Untrussing of Humorous Poet* (1601) by Dekker (and Marston?) defends its authors from charges made against them by Jonson in *Cynthia's Revels*. As a dramatic piece it has more resemblance to a conventional comedy because these playwrights had more reverence for plot. Three stories carry the load of the critical message: a romantic one involving Celeste and her bridegroom Walter Terrill and King William Rufus who covets the bride (in this there is a satiric touch, for though not mentioned in the play it is of course Walter Terrill, according to Holinshed, who accidentally kills King William Rufus while he is hunting); as a second plot there is a burlesque of the love-chase shown by old Mother Mumblecrust and her unwilling gallants; while the third plot is devoted to the most important matter in hand, the untrussing of Jonson, or Horace as the authors sarcastically name him. They show Horace muffled, stabbed with an apple, tossed in a blanket, judged and sentenced, and crowned with nettles. The authors in their spirited epilogue beseech the audience not to hiss the play so that Jonson will not be provoked to answer.

Of course Jonson answered as soon as he was able with *The Poetaster* (1601). In this play he keeps the characterization of Horace, whose prestige he heightens by showing his close and cordial relationship to his patron Augustus Caesar. Jonson says:

When wit and arts were at their height in Rome  
 . . . Virgil, Horace and the rest  
 Of those great master spirits did not want  
 Detractors then or practices against them.<sup>19</sup>

Marston is shown again as Crispinus, the chief detractor of Horace, "the parcel poet," "in his embroidered hat with the ash colored feather, who dogs [Horace's] footsteps and tries to pirate his writings." Dekker also reappears as the minor detractor of Horace and he is scathingly referred to as "a dresser of plays about the town here."

<sup>19</sup> Jonson, *Poetaster*, "Apologetical Dialogue," p. 350.

When the accusations of these nuisance-poets are no longer bearable, Caesar arraigns them. The Emperor hears the complaints of Crispinus and Demetrius against Horace and finds them invalid. The two realize their folly and make a plea of guilty. At this point Jonson has an inspiration, he adapts an old lazzi device and makes Crispinus vomit up all his offending words: "Oh—retrograde—reciprocal—incubus . . . Oh—glibbery—lubrical—defunct—Oh . . . Magnificate . . . spurious—snotteries . . . Oh—barmy froth . . . Puffy—inflate—turgidous—ventositous . . . Oh—oblatrant—furibund—fatuate—strenuous . . . Oh—conscious—damp . . . Oh—Oh Prorumped . . . Oh clutcht . . . Snarling gusts—quaking custard . . . Oh obstupefact. . . ." <sup>20</sup> Purged to the last word, Crispinus and his satellite Demetrius are last seen receiving recommendations from Virgil of a literary diet for their rehabilitation. With this brilliant finale Jonson seems to have rested his case in the war between the theatres. It is interesting, however, to note the later allusions of other playwrights to this serial exchange of blows in the second Parnassus play.

The three Parnassus plays are the product of certain unknown Cambridge wits who took the opportunity of satirizing the public's hostility to men of learning. The first, *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (1598–1599), was apparently so warmly received that two continuations of the story were written. *The Pilgrimage* depicts the travels of Philomusus and his friend Studioso through allegorical regions of peril, where they encounter such snares as liquor, lechery, money, and stupidity. These two aspiring men of letters are so idealistic that they triumph over temptation with consummate ease and arrive safely and quickly at Parnassus. There, they drop to their knees and drink the pure water of the Helicon.

In *The Return from Parnassus* (1599–1602), Philomusus and Studioso (having even less personality than before) try their luck in London. Fortunately, for the sake of the audience they are joined by the amusing Ingenioso, the pamphleteer, "the tattered prodigal," and Luxurioso, the ballad maker of "the jolly soul" and "the watery wit." At first they are filled with high ambitions and

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. M<sub>3</sub> and M<sub>3</sub> verso.

hopes of success; but they are soon cast down and satisfied to find any means to hold body and soul together. Ingenioso is the only one who can make a groat, and this he does by composing sonnets and love letters for chambermaids, serving men, and fools, in any style they fancy ("pure Chaucer, Spenser or Shakespeare"). In the last act, all except Ingenioso leave England for "Rome or Rheims," because, filled with despair and disillusionment, they have concluded that

Midas brood forever must honored be  
While Phoebus' followers live in misery.

The second continuation of the story is *The Return from Parnassus, II; or, The Scourge of Simony* (1601-1603). In the prologue of this piece it is admitted that Studioso, as well as Philomusus, is an "individuum vagum" and three new literary types are added to give them support: Furor Poeticus, Phantasma, and Academico. It is obvious what is happening: the "ideal" defenders of the literary art have become so vague and uninteresting that less admirable representatives of the profession have had to be called upon to give them dramatic support. But the authors realize that in all fairness these corruptors of literature should receive the satiric treatment which is their due. The anomalous result of this conviction is shown in the last Parnassus play, where the literary world comes in for as much satire as the callous public received in the first.

A subject for satire more usual than these intellectual protests, and a subject better suited for the popular audience, was the scrutiny of a realm and the exposure therein of the evils inherent in government and morals. Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604) is an example of this type of satire. In the play, Malevole, the deposed Duke disguises as the Malcontent, by means of words alone (which is a nice touch). With this verbal camouflage he is able to pass freely throughout the realm. He scrutinizes its people and its customs, and he looses a lava of criticism upon the evils which he discovers. In the end, he receives back his dukedom and holds a conventional judgment scene in which he distributes punishments and rewards where they are due.

Along with this type of straight satire, a notable and interesting variant is found in productions after 1603, that is, after the succession of James I. The plays referred to are actually children's plays constructed for the amusement and edification of Henry, the young Prince of Wales, generally recognized as a youth of great charm and potential ability. Middleton dedicates *Phoenix* (1603-1604) to the Prince and presents as a hero, a young heir-apparent who travels through his realm much as the Malcontent does, though in a more conventional disguise. *Phoenix* "looks into the heart and bowels of the dukedom and marks all abuses ready for reformation or punishment." In due course, he reveals himself and sits in judgment, rewarding the good and punishing the evil.

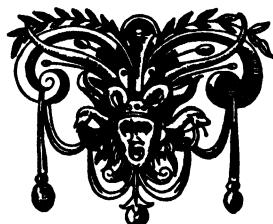
Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* (1603-1605) like *The Phoenix* is dedicated to Prince Henry and, beyond the purpose of a pleasant review of a period of English history, it is also intended to point out certain temptations of which a young Prince should beware. It is interesting to note that this play has all the ingredients which are at present considered desirable in children's plays, such as audience participation, child characters, lessons, games, bad men, funny men, and an emphasis upon bold action and physical comedy. Rowley showed his sound sense of child psychology by choosing a child hero and by illustrating his temptations and his resistance to them in terms which could be easily understood. The story of "the birth and virtuous life of Edward Prince of Wales" is composed of loosely related episodes, including the moment of his birth, an incident of his education, a jolly adventure of King Henry VIII, and the Prince's eloquent plea for Protestantism. The plot which holds the play together is supplied by what, in its many repetitions, became a stock play device, namely the rise and fall of Cardinal Wolsey.

*When You See Me You Know Me* could not have failed to please the young heir. It is a strange coincidence that Rowley should have chosen the story of one Prince of promise who died at the untimely age of sixteen as an example for another Prince who was to die at eighteen.

*Advice to the Elizabethan Playwright*

To sum up briefly the advice given in this chapter it should be said that anyone wishing to write an Elizabethan play should first make the general determination of what dramatic form best suited his talents, be it tragedy, comedy, history, romance, or satire. After choosing his medium, a playwright should select an appropriate theme, bearing clearly in mind that though novelty has its value, the safest choice is probably a time-proven theme, one which easily suggests a strong plot or story. To an Elizabethan the great popularity enjoyed by tragedies based upon the themes of revenge and ambition could not be overlooked. In the field of comedy he should not forget the many successful presentations of the love-chase: the old man futilely pursuing the young girl, the romantic lover deceiving all and carrying her off, the persistent maiden following her indifferent gallant. He should consider the theme of "guile": the intriguer who gulls or matches wits or is "beguiled" himself. He should consider the theme of prodigality: the wastrel son, the man who cannot resist material pleasures, who falls and is punished; the theme of patience, its trials to the limit of human endurance and its ultimate triumph and reward. He should not forget that the two most basic struggles in drama are those of age against youth and of evil against good.

When the playwright has selected one of these themes, he should then be counseled to give his attention to the choice of an appropriate leading character to personify the theme and of secondary characters to assist or to oppose the protagonist.





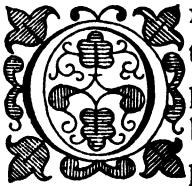
## CHAPTER III

# Characters

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### *Stock Characters*

#### THE FAMILY

NE often reads that the Greeks invented such comic types as the testy father, the easygoing father, the patient wife, the impatient wife, the henpecked husband, the libertine, the courtezan, the procuress, the parasite, the braggart, the country bumpkin, the dull servant, the cunning servant, and so on; but the truth is that these functional characters, like certain others common to tragedy, were invented by dramatic necessity itself. Plays have always been written about them and always will be, because they are the basis of drama. When one studies a primitive theatre, one finds that these types are bluntly drawn and symbolize little beyond a single emotion which they have been chosen to represent, but in a sophisticated theatre secondary emotions are added to enrich and complicate their personalities.

In theatres of later eras one recognizes without difficulty characters modeled upon the prototype of the stupid old father, Strepsiades, of Aristophanes' *Clouds*; the easygoing father, Demaenetus, of Plautus' *Asinaria*; and the crafty father, Simo, of Terence's

*Andria.* One also finds characters patterned after the riotous son, Philippides, in *The Clouds*, and the painfully prudish son, Lysites, of Plautus' *Trinummus*. One recognizes descendants of Euripides' loyal wife, Alcestis, and Terence's long-suffering Myrrina of *Hecyra*; and recognizes shrews like the wife of Menaechmus I in Plautus' *Menaechmi* and Nausistrata in Terence's *Phormio*; as well as heartless Amazons like Aristophanes' Lysistrata and his Praxagora in *The Ecclesiazusae*; also henpecked husbands like Cinesias and Blepyrus; or deceitful husbands like Lysidamus in Plautus' *Casina* and Cremes in Terence's *Phormio*; and scheming wives like Cleustrata in Plautus' *Casina*.

In Elizabethan comedies one usually discovers that when the plot is concentrated upon the action of a young hero or heroine, the father and mother and any brothers or sisters who are presented play secondary roles, and according to the central theme, their relationship to the main character fits into one of several grooves.

If the young maid is poor, her father is usually shown as devoted to her but humble and ignorant and unable to help her, like Ianicolo, the basketmaker in *Patient Grissell*, or the poor goldsmith, Lucy's father, in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, who stands by helplessly, weeping at Lucy's indignities, while she, being the conventionally perfect daughter, weeps to see him weep. In such situations a mother is rarely shown, perhaps because it was felt that one tender parent supplied sufficient sympathy.

If a daughter is of a wealthy family, the father is likely to be characterized in one of two ways. The first is as an indulgent father who believes in letting girls wed as they please. This type is represented by Sir Harry, the father of Gratiana in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*; Sir Godfrey, the father of the fair Maid of Bristow; Sir Edward Fortune, the genial father of Katherine and Camelia in *The Entertainment of Jack Drum*; and Sir Lancelot Spurcocke, the father of Lucy, Delia, and Frances in *The London Prodigal*. In these instances there also seems to be no need for further parental characterization and in none of these plays does a mother appear.

The alternative attitude of the prosperous father is one of stern

## CHARACTERS

opposition to his daughter's choice because he hopes to further his own fortunes by arranging a more lucrative match. Sir Arthur Clare, Millicent's father in *The Merry Devil* is such a man, as is the Duke in *The Honest Whore* and Gripe in *Wily Beguiled* and Quomodo in *Michaelmas Term*. In all these plays, with the exception of *The Honest Whore*, a mother is also shown who, in contrast to the father, is sympathetic with the daughter. The characterization of mothers is usually not so forceful as those of fathers. An extreme example is shown in the case of Lady Clare in *The Merry Devil*. She disappears after the opening scenes and, when the author is reminded of her in the finale, he casually apologizes for her absence by saying that she was left in a nunnery some while ago and should now be notified of the events which have transpired. A delightful and unusual contrast to the nebulous characterization of a mother is that of Mistress Flower, the mother of Phyllis the fair Maid of the Exchange. This self-respecting woman opposes her husband's choice of a son-in-law, not shrewishly but realistically, reasonably and good-naturedly, parrying every derogatory word of Master Flower's criticism of her choice, with a word of commendation.

Young heroes are usually sired by a stern parent like Valerio's father Gostanzo in *All Fools* or by an indulgent parent like Rinaldo's father, Marc Antonio, in the same play (here, the fathers are contrasted as in Terence's *Andria*). The indulgent parent is obviously the type who is most likely to have a prodigal son, and he is often shown as being sympathetic to the most disgraceful filial excesses, like Sir Eustace, Vallenger's father in *The Fair Maid of Bristow* and Old Arthur in *The Good Wife*. Old Flowerdale in *The London Prodigal* goes even further than the others, he actually tries to aid his son by following him along the primrose path disguised as a servant. The last idea was obviously attractive and variants of the situation are found in such plays as *Michaelmas Term*, where not only the Country Wench's father follows her as a servant but also old Widow Gruel follows her degenerate and upstart son in an even lower capacity.

Another familiar father of either a young man or a young girl is the Pantalone type, the stern, hypocritical, senile lover who either competes with his son or flirts with some pretty young thing his daughter's age like the old Duke in *Gentleman Usher* and all the old fathers in *The Wit of a Woman*.

From the beginning of the drama, physically attractive young men, whether their intentions are good or bad, have been expected to be successful in their quests. Elizabethan lovers are no exception and, though some are models of manly virtue and true victims of romantic passion, more are gay deceivers, irresistible and irresponsible. Wit is a fashionable attribute of the lover, and it is to be noted as the years go by that he shows an increasing facility with the bright phrase and the clever trick. Sometimes all the gallants in a play are witty and the plot is a mad game of verbal catch as catch can.

One finds several young maids who are also very clever, and in *The Wit of a Woman*, as the title might indicate, they outstrip the gallants in matters of invention. The concession to a woman that she may be witty is an excellent dramatic notion, the development of which, in the history of the theatre, is interesting to watch. It is one of the easiest and surest ways to give a pleasing personality to what would otherwise be an insipid ingénue, a fact as clear to the Elizabethans as to twentieth century playwrights.

The chastity of ingénues appears to be an unimportant matter to most Elizabethan playwrights, as it was to the classic writers. The most popular heroine of Roman comedy one remembers is the harp girl, who in the early scenes is shown residing at the courtezan's house, where she is the mistress of the violent young lover. It is only at the end of the play that this young man makes the conventional discovery that the harp girl is the long-lost daughter of some Athenian, therefore a citizen, and therefore marriageable. Menander's *The Girl from Samos* has two unchaste heroines, each of whom has borne her lover a child, and Menander's *Arbitration* shows the popular version of the bed-trick, with the revelation in the end that the respectable girl has been seduced at a festival before her marriage by a man who turns out to be her present husband.

This situation is effectively used by Plautus in *Aulularia* and by Terence in *Hecyra*.

The idea that Elizabethan ingénues are chaste comes from our present acceptance of the dramatic convention combined with the assumption that all Elizabethan heroines are like Shakespeare's heroines. This is not true; the latter stand apart because of their chastity and constancy, as embodying the romantic ideal of love. In Shakespeare's play vulgar passions are reserved for the strong evil woman, or for the minor characters, or for the low characters. The casual young maids in the plays of Lyly, Chapman, Middleton, and Marston act wholly in accordance with the ancient and medieval conventions of the *Ars Amandi*.

Within the state of matrimony the most common characterizations are again found to follow certain prototypes: the riotous husband and his patient wife, like the Young Arthurs in the *Good Wife* and the Young Chartleys in *The London Prodigal*; the villainous and scheming husband and his saintly wife, like the Marquis and Grissell, Lurdos and his Countess in *Law Tricks* and the Captain and Castiza in *The Phoenix*; the jealous husband, like Cornelio and his perfect wife Gazetta in *All Fools*; the patient husband and the shrewish wife, like Candido and Viola in *The Honest Whore*; the suspicious husband and his flirtatious or unfaithful wife, like the merchants and their wives in *Westward Ho!* and Master and Mistress Frankford in *The Woman Killed with Kindness*.)

The widow appears occasionally in classical plays—in Terence's *Adelphi* for example—but she is not so popular a figure in the classic theatre as she is in Elizabethan comedy. Here, she is more often shown as rich and flirtatious rather than poor and miserable. If she happens to remarry, as Gwenthyan does in *Patient Grissell*, she usually becomes a shrew directly after the ceremony. The once-blustering Welsh knight, Sir Owen, laments the change in Gwenthyan who before marriage seemed so pleasing and tractable. He says woefully: "You all know her well, you know her face is little, fair and smug, but her has a tongue goes jingle, jangle, jangle bet-

ter and worse than bells when a house is a-fire. Patient, ha, ha! . . . a pox on her! La!"<sup>1</sup>

In Marston's *What You Will*, a widow is the leading lady, though in truth she is mistaken in believing that she is a widow. "Coy, too nice" Celia is an impatient Penelope who all too eagerly gives her hand to the wandering French knight, Sir Laverdure, "a God knows what," after which her anomalous state becomes the crux of the comic situation of the plot.

Eugenia in *Sir Giles Goosecap* is an interesting combination of the widow and the female pedant, the blue stocking, "the dame of learning," a character already amusing to playwrights and fast becoming a type for satiric comedy. Eugenia is "a good, learned scholar," the doctor in the play admits, as does Clarence. The latter loves her hopelessly, for, as he bemoans, "her estate and mine are so unequal. And then her knowledge passeth mine so far."<sup>2</sup> The brilliant lady's page once makes the flattering and obvious allusion that "she is the best scholar of any woman but one in England." He then reverts to the satiric vein, saying, "She has one strange quality for a woman besides. She can love reasonably constantly, for she loved her husband only for almost a whole year."<sup>3</sup>

The most unusual widow and mother is Middleton's character of Mother Gruel. The father who, anxious and game, follows his roistering son in disguise, has been noted in *The London Prodigal*, but in *Michaelmas Term*, as has been indicated, a mother does even more for her son. Andrew, né Gruel, son of a toothpuller, who has assumed the more mellifluous name of Lethe to further his lecheries in London, delights in the presumption of hiring as a bawd his own mother, who has followed him to the city because she is destitute.

Though not shown as frequently as widows, widowers are sometimes portrayed in Elizabethan comedy. Their characterizations are based upon the avaricious old father, the Pantalone character. Like him they are usually ridiculously and odiously and unsuccessfully

<sup>1</sup> Chettle, Dekker, and Haughton, *Patient Grissill*, sig. L2 verso.

<sup>2</sup> *Sir Giles Goosecap*, sig. I verso.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. A4.

in love with a young girl. In *The Wit of a Woman*, as has been pointed out, the four old widowers are in love with various of each other's daughters, and they receive, also according to the Pantalone tradition, their proper reward in the end. Curvetto, the decayed Spanish courtier in *Blurt Master Constable*, and Lorenzo, the old senator in *May Day*, though their marital state is not a subject of interest, are also variations of the Commedia and classic libertine.

All these types which have been outlined as comedy figures lend themselves to tragedy with a change or increase of emphasis in the interpretation or in the writing: scheming fathers bring about their children's fall in *Thomas Wyatt*; Othello is a jealous husband; the King of Spain a faithless spouse in *The Noble Soldier*; as are Hamlet's mother, and the Queen of Spain in *Lust's Dominion*.

The tradition of the strong and evil woman, the lascivious or jealous wife, is popular in Greek and Roman tragedy and it continues to be so in Elizabethan times, reinforced no doubt by the well-known treachery of Eve. The classic villainess, however, cedes her position of dominance in most tragedies to the Elizabethan creation of the villain-hero, a devil incarnate, to whom the villainess customarily plays the part of an accomplice or devil's dame.

One of the distinctions of Elizabethan drama is its interesting development of minor characters, to be seen particularly in members of the family group. Sisters and brothers, though their parts are secondary, are frequently painted entertainingly. Camelia, the vain and changeable, light "fantastic" daughter of Sir Edward adds much merriment to *Jack Drum's Entertainment*. Her witty maid, Winifred (which seems to be a common name for witty maids) is able to convince her in two minutes' time that she loves not the second man she thought she did, but a third, a new and different suitor. Camelia cries "Lord, what a tide of hate comes creeping on, upon my former judgment . . ." and then, punning on the name of her new passion, the quixotic Planet, "Oh I am Planet-stricken, Winifred, how shall I intimate my love to him?"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Marston, *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, sig. G2.

Julia, the spinster in *Patient Grissell*, is a good example of the type, which is perhaps more appealingly phrased as "the maid who has too long defied Cupid." Julia regards marriage "as some Indians do the sun, adore it, and reverence it, but dare not stare on it for fear of being stark blind."<sup>5</sup> Delia, one of the three daughters of Sir Lancelot Spurcocke in *The London Prodigal*, and worldly, fast-talking Crispinella, one of the two daughters of Sir Herbert Subboys in *The Dutch Courtezan*, voice Julia's opinions and wholeheartedly agree with her that they would rather, as the familiar phrase goes "lead Apes into Hell," than marry.

Frances, another daughter of Sir Lancelot, is an amusing type, the feminine version of the lout. Frances is "neither fair nor wise" and, the author adds for good measure, "she cannot cook." She is a hopeless dolt, and the effect of comedy is doubled when she succeeds in landing the foolish Master Civit who is another dolt. One of the triumphs of dramatic art over life is the miraculous rapidity with which the couple marry, set up a house, and hire a cook within the course of a single scene (the last, it should be said, however, is not the result of Frances' wit, but of her sister Lucy's, who has disguised as the cook). It is interesting to note that this household employee, the cook, though not often encountered in the casts of Elizabethan plays was a popular classic type, conspicuous in such comedies as: Menander's *Arbitration*; Plautus' *Casina*, *Curculio*, *Menaechmi*, *Mercator*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Pseudolus*, while two cooks were shown in his *Aulularia*.

Small children frequently appear in the plays. They are used either in the interest of the plot as in *The Royal King* and *The Noble Soldier*, or for pleasant divertissement as in *The Merry Wives*, or, according to the old classic custom, for tragic pathos, like Grissell's hapless infants, Hala's victims, the innocent children of Antwerp, and the poor children of Mistress Frankford. One cannot forget the gruesome murder of the child in *Cambyses* or the scene in *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington*, where "pretty little George" Bruce's rotting body is seen "through a casement."

<sup>5</sup> Chettle, *et al.*, *Patient Grissill*, sig. D.

No theatre has ever denied what the Greeks were quick to recognize, that innocent children and helpless old men held great power to excite pity: Euryaces, the child of Agax and his courtezan; Eumelus, the child of Alcestes and Admetus; and those helpless victims of slaughter, the children of Jason and Medea; the children of Polymestor; the children of Hercules and the children of Hector. Choruses of children with their piping voices and old men with their cracking plaints were known to be effective, and the characters of old advisers, blind, feeble prophets, helpless Oedipus, and old Amphitryon were chosen for a reason. The device of presenting three generations, a distinctive characteristic of Greek tragedy, was employed with a conscious purpose.

### *The Household*

It is obvious when so much action in the classic theatre takes place off stage that news has to be announced and reports carried to distant places. The messenger, who is usually uncharacterized, takes care of the long trips and the most breathtaking announcements, but the less impressive duties around the house have always belonged to the servants. The slaves are as important to classic plays as the pages are to the Elizabethan, and as the inevitable maid is now who answers the telephone and talks as she dusts.

In classic tragedy the character of a slave is not often developed. He is simply a running slave, a tool to the action. A place of more importance is held by the nurse who usually plays the role of confidante to the heroine. In comedy, however, slaves early develop personalities: the cunning slave, the stupid slave, the loyal slave, the treacherous slave, the impudent slave, the drunken slave, and so on. The descendants of these boys are easily recognizable in the Elizabethan theatre: witty Roger in *The Honest Whore*, dull, slow, cowardly Swash in *The Blind Beggar*, garrulous Babulo in *Patient Grissell*, loyal Fidelio in *Phoenix* and Nicholas in *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, treacherous Lorrique in *Hoffman*.

These types have always interested the spectator and have served

the author well, for besides being able to announce entrances and deliver exposition, these boys can easily change the scene, or bring on necessary properties or hearten the audience with a humorous jest. They can assist in unraveling the main plot or in holding the skein of multiple plots together. They can keep the audience *au courant*; and if the author becomes really hard pressed, they can put on a comic interlude to cover his embarrassment.

The first duty of the page seems to be to serve as his master's accomplice in whatever project is afoot (in a comedy, this is usually a love-chase). In the performance of duty the page customarily shows a marked independence, however, being only as attentive to the business as his own drinking, gaming, and sparkling permit.

The dramatic effect of contrasting two types of pages is common in the Elizabethan theatre, just as it was in the Greek theatre and in the *Commedia dell' Arte*. The most usual form is the dull boy shown as a foil to the witty boy, the physically slow fellow contrasted to the nimble wag. This device is conspicuous in many of Shakespeare's plays (such characters as Speed and Launce and the Gobbos). Sometimes Elizabethans employ more than one page as a foil to the leading boy, as in *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, where lagging Joculo is contrasted to both the waggish Moys and the slippery Frisco. In *What You Will*, with studied satiric effect Marston presents such a complete and varied assortment of pages that they overpower their masters.

The witty servant is sometimes modeled on the cunning classic slave, and sometimes upon the professional jester. The latter character is essentially medieval and has no counterpart in the classic theatre. He is descended directly from the jester of the court or feudal household. As a dramatic character he appears early in both English and French plays; in the latter, however, he never asserts himself beyond a conventional and thoroughly undramatic interpretation. But in English plays the fool often assumes a welcome independence. In many cases he develops a personality of his own, like Feste in *Twelfth Night* or the bitter fool Passarello in *The Malcontent*. In *When You See Me* the court jesters Patch and Will

Summer<sup>6</sup> are the illustrious fools of Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry VIII, respectively, and their portraits have the warmth and humanity and the interest, of historical biography.

It is known that certain actors played the roles of fools to such perfection that their own personalities had influence upon the creation of the characters. Will Kemp, with his bagful of tricks, and his lazzi and his morris dancing, did much to control the development of the character from 1590 to 1599, during which time he was with Shakespeare's company. In plays by this author, and probably by the other authors in the company's employ, parts were written in for him. The changing fashion in the fool after 1600 is illustrated by Kemp's equally popular successor, the more subtle Armin, the singing fool.

Because the fool was an exceedingly popular character, he was often forced into a play for no justifiable reason. This practice led the satiric authors of the Parnassus plays to drag an actor on to the stage by a rope around his neck, with the explanation that "clowns have been thrust into plays by the head and shoulders ever since Kemp could make a scurvy face."<sup>7</sup> Whether called by the name of clown or fool, these extraneous characters were unsound dramatically and they ultimately lost public favor. Young Scattergood attests to this fact in Shadwell's *The Woman Captain* (produced 1679) by saying, "'tis out of fashion for great men to keep fools . . . 'tis exploded even on the stage."

The fact that the witty jester, despite the nice irony, was ever called a "fool" accounts for the confusion of the terms fool and clown, which titles were freely and loosely used in Elizabethan times, much to our present perplexity. The first definition in the Oxford Dictionary of the word "fool" is "one deficient in judgment or sense, a silly person, a simpleton," which is obviously the description of a dull rather than a witty man. When Jonson and other satirists held that, though fools were the basis of comedy,

<sup>6</sup> Will Summer is also prominent in Nash's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, London, 1600.

<sup>7</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, Macray ed. Act V.

the greatest ones were to be found in other livery than the "conventional motley," they did their bit toward making a distinction. As time went on, the air cleared further, and such remarks as that of Young Scattergood above indicate that clever professionals were no longer conventional household servitors. Amateur wits had taken over the art of practical joking, while the clowns, the dullards, the gulls had reinherited the name of "fools."

Returning to the consideration of household servants, we find the nurse to be the most prominent female servant in classic tragedy. Conventionally, Medea, Deianira, Phaedra, and Clytemnestra are attended by nurses. These are usually undeveloped in personality and are employed mainly for the purpose of letting the heroine reveal to the audience in dialogue form all that she feels and plans. This classic, listening nurse is not so common in Elizabethan plays as the more animated and more earthy *Commedia* type, like the rough, free-spoken nurse of gentle Beatrice in *The Dutch Courtezan* and of the nurse of Lelia in *Wily Beguiled*. The picture of the latter character, incidentally, is enhanced by two relations: her mother, Mother Midnight, and her wanton daughter Peggy Pudding, who "loves and loves and cannot tell who" till she kisses and finds out. Temperance is the ironic name given to Lady Lucretia's maid in *May Day*, who like the others is chiefly concerned with the salacious adventures which she can stir up for her mistress. One cannot help noticing the resemblance of these characters to Juliet's nurse, whose coarseness makes such an excellent foil for the delicacy and innocence of her mistress.

The lady's maid is not uncommon in Roman and Italianate comedy, and as a type she becomes more and more important in Elizabethan comedy. She performs with ease all the nurse's functions, confidante, note-bearer, and procurer if necessary, and she is also a pleasing figure in her own right. She is often like Douce in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, pretty, witty, and very corruptible. Her heart is customarily as full of love for the lackey as her mistress' is for the lord, and this makes for pleasant variation on the romantic story. It is quite usual for this witty wench to possess tal-

ents beyond the call of the plot, she is often directed, for instance, to sing or to dance. One can watch this versatile type of chamber-maid becoming not only one of the gayest and most ornamental features of Restoration comedy, but also one of its most important props.

### *Courtezans and Bawds*

The bawds of Plautus and Terence (often highly characterized) have their descendants in Elizabethan plays, and their names, one sees, leave little to the imagination: Mistress Bawdy Face (*Royal King*), Mistress Splay (*The Good Wife*), Birdlime (*Westward Ho!*), and Mistress Fingerlock (*The Honest Whore*). It may well have been with tongue in cheek that Shakespeare called his procress in *Measure for Measure* Mistress Overdone.

The traditional pimp, though seen in such characters as Pandarus (*Troilus and Cressida*), is more apt to be shown in Elizabethan comedy as a bright little page to the courtezan, like Roger and Brabo and Hellgill. These boys are customarily endowed with all the qualities of the witty servant, plus a scurrilous tongue.

Courtezans were essential to classic comedy and it is worth noting the increasing interest in their depiction. Aristophanes and Menander give generalized and suggestive characterizations of harp girls and flute girls, but Plautus and Terence delve deep into the study of particularized courtezans. Hardly a comedy <sup>8</sup> of theirs is without such a character. They also present the harp girls and flute girls, but these they distinguish as being the pretty and unknown young creatures who have recently come to the courtezan's house and are now the mistresses of the young lovers.

There is rich variety in the types of courtezans depicted in Latin comedy: pert Paricompsa in Plautus' *Mercator*, heartless Phronesium in *Truculentus*, kind Thais in Terence's *Eunuchus*, and Bacchis,

<sup>8</sup> Greek tragedy treats several concubines, usually sympathetically. Tecmessa, the concubine in Sophocles' *Ajax* is acknowledged one of the most loving and appealing women in Greek tragedy.

the noblest Roman courtezan of them all, in his *Hecyra*. These types are rediscovered in Elizabethan comedy, the prosperous and fascinating Imperia, the heartless Franceschina, and haughty Florence, the helpful and playful Mistress Mary, and noble Bellafront. Imperia, the Venetian courtezan in *Blurt Master Constable* is typical of the more prosperous members of her profession. Her lodgings serve as the setting of several scenes; in fact she holds informal court in her rooms, where everyone, including the Duke, seeks her company.

The beautiful Bellafront, the London courtezan in Dekker's *Honest Whore* is also much sought after and it is boasted that she makes twenty pounds a night. To the disgust of her bawd, Mistress Fingerlock, and her pander, little Roger, she falls in love with a good man and reforms. Interesting possibilities are obvious in the notion of a courtezan's conversion, and the action is, after all, no more improbable than that popular theme of a rake's reform. The play of *The Honest Whore* was greeted with enthusiasm, and as was not an uncommon practice, the story was continued the following year. The further adventures of Bellafront were shown, how she was "persuaded by strong arguments to turn courtezan again, her brave refuting those arguments."<sup>9</sup>

The claim is sometimes found that Marston's *Dutch Courtezan* (produced 1603-1604) was an answer to *The Honest Whore* (produced 1604). It is obvious from the dates that this could be possible only if *The Dutch Courtezan* had been produced during the latter year; if this were the case, the assertion might have weight. The bold Franceschina is certainly the complete antithesis of Bellafront. She is straight Phronesium untouched by any pangs of Christian conscience. Even the conventional last scene of repentance for all sinners finds her unbowed and unabashed. Franceschina, the "punk rampant," as her creator terms her, is the most unregenerate whore encountered in all the plays of the particular period.

Florence, "the bold queen" in *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1603-1604), at first appears to be as thoroughly dishonest. In the

<sup>9</sup> Dekker, *The Second Part of the Honest Whore*, London, 1630.

early scenes she swears to "be faithful as Grissell" to a young gallant named Sentloe, but she soon deserts him for the bridegroom Vallenger and soon thereafter tries to kill Vallenger because she believes that his fortune is lost. She engineers this act of treachery by making it appear that he has been murdered by his best friend. When all her crimes are discovered, Florence is arraigned, but she appears repentant "ne'er a whit at all." As she is led toward the executioner she utters this light and unfeeling speech:

Come noble heart, let's fearless march away  
A little hanging will dispatch us all.<sup>10</sup>

However, directly after these lines, the difference between Florence and Franceschina becomes apparent. Touched by Anabel's heroic love for Vallenger and urged by the King of England, Florence finally "sorrows something on her sins" and King Richard, of the great heart, noting her repentance, gives her a far more lenient sentence than she deserves, even promising her that he will find her a husband if her "faults remain banished."

Mistress Mary in *How to Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, unlike Florence, is sympathetic and understanding toward her rival. She has a gentle heart and a fine sense of humor, and when Young Master Arthur makes his final surrender to her, she exclaims to her boy, "here comes the silly fool that we long since have set our lime twigs for, begone and leave me to entangle him."<sup>11</sup> When, soon afterward, Mary entangles him into marriage, she plays termagant and in the end, when Mistress Arthur miraculously revives, Mary hands back her husband with, one supposes, considerable relief.

Cassio's courtezan, Bianca, in *Othello* is also sympathetically drawn, and if one judges from her lines alone (and not from what business, directors may choose to add in production) she can be said, like other women in Shakespeare's plays, to be a man's ideal of her type. Her importance in the play, however, is not for the

<sup>10</sup> *The Faire Maide of Bristow*, sig. E3 verso.

<sup>11</sup> *How a Man May Chuse a Good Wife from a Bad*, 6th ed., H2.

color of her personality nor of that of her profession, but her actual use in the plot. Cassio's affection for her is added proof to the audience that Iago lies in his accusation of the Captain's love for Desdemona. Bianca's presence in the play also affords a further hand into which the fatal handkerchief can stray.

One of the most realistic contemporary portraits is that of Lucy in *Westward Ho!* Mistress Birdlime brings so many men to this courtezan that when Master Tenterhook sneaks in and playfully blindfolds Lucy and asks her to give her lover's name she vainly calls off all the gallants in the play and more besides.

### *Thieves and Rogues*

Still other low-life characters are masterful portrayals of contemporary figures: thieves, coney-catchers, "rowsy rakeheels," sturdy beggars, and wild rogues. It is not surprising to find these characters on the stage when thousands of them in reality plagued the kingdom. An Italian traveler at the end of the fifteenth century reported that "there is no country in the world where there are so many thieves and robbers as in England, in so much that few venture to go alone into the country excepting in the middle of the day and fewer still into the towns at night, and least of all in London."<sup>12</sup> Many of these vagrants were, in the time of Elizabeth, discharged military retainers for whom there was no place in an economy of peace. Others were persons displaced when the enclosing of the fields rendered families and whole communities homeless—thirty to fifty thousand people in southern England alone, it is thought. The abolition of Catholicism had also cast out numbers of priests and retainers and monastic servants. The want and the lawlessness of these desperate people constituted one of the major social problems of Elizabeth's time.

There are several portrayals of thieves and rogues. Heywood's banditti in *The Four Prentices* are of the romanticized type, while

<sup>12</sup> *Italian Relation of England*, Camden Society, 1847, p. 34; also A. V. Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, London, 1930, p. xv.

Hadland and Snip and "their man" in *The Blind Beggar* are realistic coney-catchers, as are Dick and Rafe, with whom Young Flowerdale, the London Prodigal, becomes associated. Certain gentlemen who are desperate also stoop to coney-catching; Bobbington and Scarlet, it will be remembered, waylay the Fair Maid of the Exchange and her companion Ursula.

In Barnardine of *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare shows an excellent rogue, one particularly appealing because he so insistently does not choose to die. The notorious Black Will of Newgate, "the chief of the stews," is another likable rogue who appears in Rowley's *When You See Me*. Powerful of limb and gallant after his own fashion he is shown childishly loyal to King Henry VIII, whom he meets during the course of the action. The King is disguised and Black Will, little guessing his true identity, urges him "to leave the court and shark" with him a while. As is apt to happen, such a pleasant rogue becomes too appealing a character to be summarily dispatched when the time comes, and Black Will in this case is allowed to reform and become a good soldier on the King's side.

*The Black Dog of Newgate* is recorded among the productions of 1603 (the year before Rowley's play) as having been written by Day, Hathway, Wentworth Smith, and "the other poet." This play, which survives in title only, is recorded as having been given in two parts, and it is possible that the subject proved popular enough to inspire Rowley's attention. The lost play was probably concerned with the myth of the Black Dog of Newgate, preserved in a poem of the same name by one Luke Hutton, a colorful Elizabethan who combined the pursuits of highwayman and pamphleteer. The story is this, that in the time of Henry VIII, when a great famine wasted the land, the prisoners in Newgate ate one another alive,

commonly choosing those that came newly in and such as could put up small resistance. Amongst others cast in the den of misery was a scholar brought thither upon suspicion of conjuring and that he by charms and devilish witchcraft had done much hurt to the King's subjects. He was

eaten by the prisoners and deemed passing good meat, but thereafter they saw him nightly in the shape of a black dog, walking up and down the prison, ready with his ravening jaws to tear out their bowels.<sup>13</sup>

### *Officers of the Law and Professional Men*

In any theatre where rogues abound, so must officers of the law. Prison keepers, and particularly headsmen, are usually shown as sympathetic characters, probably to heighten the pathos of the scene. The Executioner in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* humbly begs Queen Jane's pardon for the offense he is about to commit and gently asks if he may "help her off with her nightgown." The headsman in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is even dignified with a name, the appropriate one of Abhorsen. It is he who cooperates with the recently mentioned Barnardine, who "will not die today for any man's persuasion," by releasing him and lying to the authorities that the head of Ragozine, a pirate who has recently died in the prison, is Barnardine's.

Officers are most often brought on stage to perform an arrest, and in many such cases they are not characterized. Those who are generally follow the character of the lout. Constables and sheriffs are assumed to be ignorant, blunt fellows, filled with the conviction of self-importance but utterly lacking in competence. They cannot read, cannot comprehend, cannot use or understand the King's English. They consider themselves men of authority but they are constantly defied and gulled. The lack of respect felt for them is evident in the frequent phrase "a fig for the Constable!" This line would seem to have been the inspiration for the title *Blurt Master Constable*. It seems curious that this officer is important only in the name of the comedy. In the action he is relatively unimportant—he appears in a few scenes only. His stupid but sinister presence does, however, suit the spirit of this "Night-walk," chiefly in places outside the law; it contributes atmosphere and suspense and seems to tie the loose threads together.

<sup>13</sup> Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, p. 507.

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Though lecherous old Justice Falso in *Phoenix* is a scheming Pantalone, justices are more often shown as foolish and ineffectual, as Shallow in *The Merry Wives* and Reason in *The Good Wife*. Reason, for example, drinks sack as he listens to a case, finds no cause, drinks more sack, dismisses the suit and asks the company to retire and join him "in a glass of good March beer."<sup>14</sup>

## LAWYERS

The interpretation of sheer malice is reserved for men of the law (a profession incidentally, not spared from the jibes of classic satire). Unlike the louts who commonly administer the law, these manipulators of it are accepted as shrewd and cunning and treacherous. They are generally pictured as old, pompous, and rich (from ill-gotten gains) and they are miserly and heartless. Their nonsense and Latin gibberish is not used in simple ignorance, but as an artifice to confound the poor and innocent common man. Middleton takes time out, in his "Induction" to *The Michaelmas Term*, to deliver a diatribe upon that "silver harvest, law," and his voluble hostility was undoubtedly held by other writers, some of whom probably knew the pinch of the law from personal experience.

Churms, the lawyer and scurvy suitor in *Wily Beguiled*, is described as a "cracking, cogging, pettifogging, buttermilk slave." Lurdos, in Day's *Law Tricks*, is a more sinister character. He who has "scraped gentility out of an attorney's fee" now plots (as a lawyer is supposed to, darkly and circuitously) how to overthrow the Duke himself. Both Churms and Lurdos have important parts in the action.

The character of Tangle in Middleton's *Phoenix* (written before *Michaelmas Term* and *Law Tricks*) is the object of straight and vigorous satire. Tangle is a busy caterpillar, forever talking Latin, "a turbulent old fellow, a villainous law-worm who eats holes in poor men's causes," who cries gleefully "'Tis very marrow, very manna to me to be in the law . . . I have found such sweet

<sup>14</sup> *How a Man May Chuse a Good Wife from a Bad*, 6th ed., D2 verso.

pleasure in the vexation of others.”<sup>15</sup> Tangle becomes so tied up in his many law suits that he goes “law-mad,” stark, raving mad; and according to the satiric tradition of Aristophanes and Jonson, he cannot be cured till he is purged. This is effected by an ingenious character called Quieto “a miracle! one quiet, suffering, un lawyered man” who opens his veins. After ink pours from them and an explosion of legal terms from his mouth, he is cured.

#### DOCTORS

Doctors are given as short shrift as lawyers, and like their prototypes in classic comedy, mysteries, and moralities, they have the same capacity for chicanery. Because of the physical exigencies of the plays (they are filled with fighting and dying), doctors, like officers of the law, are needed to make a brief and perfunctory appearance, and in such cases they are uncharacterized. However, when doctors are given personality, the general caricature follows the line of Dr. Pock in Chapman’s *All Fools* and Dr. Cornelius, the surgeon in *Monsieur d’Olive*.

Certain doctors, like the lawyers specified, are important characters in the plays. Jonson had the presumption in *Sejanus* to portray an historical doctor in the character of Eudemus. Both this man and Dr. Benedict in *The Honest Whore* are necessary to the plot, and the demand made in each case is the same, that of poisoning a man. Eudemus supplies the poison in Act II but does not do the deed, in fact he disappears from the action after fulfilling this service. Dr. Benedict goes a little further; he undertakes the poisoning of Hippolito, but he employs a potion rather than poison. Dr. Benedict thus remains important to the plot for a longer time than Eudemus, but he too disappears after Act IV.

Dr. Nemo in *The Wit of a Woman* is one of the widowers and as such is a leading character; but the fact that he belongs to the medical profession is used only to sharpen the humorous characterization of this old Pantalone. Dr. Glister, the vicious father in *The*

<sup>15</sup> Middleton, *The Phoenix*, sig. B4.

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*Family of Love*, the lecherous old man with the provocative red beard, is also a leading character, and Middleton has chosen his profession with conscious intention.

A variant interpretation of the physician is the French doctor, or the Italian or Spanish doctor, all different names for the same charlatan. This character is a self-determined specialist who has a liberal supply of foreign phrases at his command, and his practice consists of performing quackery upon the rich and of making love to the young and pretty.

He may be an actual French Doctor, like the celebrated Dr. Caius in *The Merry Wives* who is shown as excitable, cowardly and ridiculous and, of course, according to the convention, far more interested in love than in medicine; or he may be an impostor who has assumed the role of a French doctor, much as he would that of a friar, to further his own affairs or those of a friend. It is interesting to note that the Devil in *Grim the Collier* chooses the disguise of a Spanish doctor as that best suited for making his experiments on earth.

## PEDANTS

The pedant or schoolmaster is frequently encountered in the Italianate comedy and as a stock character he is destined to immortality. For some strange reason the average man will never admit that learning is enjoyable; education is assumed to be painful and boring, and the teacher or the student as a fool is a dramatic characterization which is called a "natural."

The Elizabethan pedant is conventionally pictured as confident of his own intellectual superiority and he addresses all lesser creatures with a condescending air, if not with downright contempt. Like other professional characters, he has an extravagant manner of speaking, using a dozen words where one will do and always preferring elegance to accuracy. His pronouncements, for he cannot be said to carry on an exchange of conversation, are punctuated with impressive but nonsensical Latin words and phrases, the flow of which is controlled by the apparent intelligence level of the

group which he addresses. The more ignorant it is, the faster and more freely the Latin falls.

Sarpego in *The Gentleman Usher* illustrates this characterization as does Sir Boniface in Thomas Heywood's *Wise Woman of Hogsdon*. The latter is described in the quarto listing of the "Dramatis Personae" as "an ignorant pedant or schoolmaster" and the further distinction is given him of being a pander. One of the most important scenes of the play is a contest by argument for the hand of the beautiful Gratiana. Sir Boniface, one of the contestants, wages his battle clumsily, with a kind of doggerel couplet of two rhymes to the line. His opponent is a witty young gallant named Sencer, who is disguised as a pedant to contend for Gratiana's hand. The climax of the scene, as could easily be predicted by any Elizabethan playgoer, comes when Sencer confounds Sir Boniface and makes him prove himself, in rhyme and by his own logic, to be an ass.

It should be stated at this time that to disguise as a teacher of one art or another is considered in no way a low trick. It is acknowledged as the easiest method by which a gallant may gain access to his mistress' house if her father finds him objectionable in his true form. With the thin disguise of a music teacher, writing teacher, or drawing teacher, the door is at once thrown open. Such a disguise is also conventional for a suspicious husband while he watches the behavior of his wife, as illustrated in *Westward Ho!*

In contrast to the satiric treatment of the pedant in Elizabethan comedy it should be noted that the moralities had held the character and the profession of teaching in considerable respect. This is evidenced by such a play as *The Nice Wanton* (1547-1553), clearly written for the edification of a youthful school audience. Scenes of instruction in plays after 1600 were, on the other hand, clearly intended for the enjoyment of adults. In them the teacher is conventionally shown as a fool and his students are either presented as helplessly stupid and lazy or naturally witty and naughty.

A scene of this nature is found in Marston's *What You Will*, when the "schoolmaster" endeavors to force some learning into the

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heads of Battus, Nous, Slip, Nathaniel, and Holofernes Pippo. Though all these students are impossible, Pippo outstrips them in ignorance. He declines his Latin nouns so incredibly that he overwhelms Simplicius, a well-named gallant, who chances to pass by. Simplicius hires him on the spot to be his page.

In the comedy *How to Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, Sir Aminidab conducts a similar scene in which his unruly students construe Latin phrases, rhyme and reason, and conclude with the familiar joke of untrussing. Sir Aminidab's outstanding pupil is Pipkin, the Good Wife's page, who admits that "I got to 'Our Father' and 'a e i o u' in the sixteenth year of my age," but he also admits that he is four and twenty at present, and from all indications he has not advanced further.

An exception to the school scenes of stereotyped lazzi is the delightful one which occurs in scene 9 of Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me*, one of the plays written for young Prince Henry. The scene chosen is an actual event, a record of which can be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Prince Edward (later Edward VI) once plays hooky and does not appear for his lessons, "playing tennis with young Dorset" instead. Young Brown, a fellow student, begs Dr. Cranmer to give him the merited whipping and spare the Prince. Edward enters a moment later to find his friend in a painful state and, when he learns the circumstances, with gratitude and affection he makes Brown kneel before him and he knights him for his "back wounds." As the interrupted lessons are resumed, Edward proves very neatly that "man is not a beast."

The characterization of older students, young men who have somehow weathered elementary education and have been sent to the University, are given in two ways. The young men are shown either as wild gallants unaffected by learning, or else new-made pedants. They are usually self-centered, complacent and indolent, and they are almost always poor. Laureo, patient Grissell's brother, first enters, newly home from the University, and while his father and Grissell apply themselves to the task of weaving baskets, he sits by idly. His father observes mournfully, "I thought by learning

thou had'st been made wise, but I perceive it puffeth up thy soul," and in a moment, he further laments "I would you could leave this Latin and fall to making baskets. . . . You think it enough if at dinner you tell us the history of the well Helicon then drink up our beer"; to which Laureo haughtily replies, "A scholar doth disdain to spend his spirits upon such base employments as hand labors."<sup>16</sup> Laureo, along with Gwenthyan and Sir Owen, is a character not found in the story of Grissell, and his inclusion in the play, like theirs, is for the purpose of entertainment.

The University man is often presented as a gull, like Giovanni, the student from Padua in Chapman's *May Day*. Giovanni has money borrowed from him and at the same time receives a lecture on the folly of lending. Gullio, in the second Parnassus play, is another ignoramus, a vain exquisite who chatters in this manner, "as for boots, I never wear a pair above two hours." He is an affected scholar, who worships "sweet Master Shakespeare" and, it is said, "sleeps with *Venus and Adonis* under his pillow." Gullio comes from Oxford, which is natural, since the authors came from Cambridge.

Several young gentlemen are mentioned as having been to either Oxford or Cambridge. Masters Gardener and Bennett in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* are from the latter University, and unfortunately, in their case, this is their only claim to fame. The most talented Cambridge man is unquestionably Peter Fabell, or the Merry Devil of Edmonton, whom the prologue would have one believe was a real person.

Young lovers are occasionally noted as being university men, and if they are of the resourceful type they are conventionally bright, witty, and insolent, like the poor but ingenious Sophos in *Wily Beguiled* and the quixotic Rinaldo in *All Fools*. The latter's ambitions are not high, but they are merry and specific and they constitute the plot of the play: "My fortune is to win renown by gulling Gostanzo, Dariotto and Cornelio."

The most flattering portraits of scholars are, as might be ex-

<sup>16</sup> Chettle, *et al.*, *Patient Grissill*, sig. 14.

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pected, self-portraits, like Philomusus and Studioso in the Parnassus plays and the more interesting series of complimentary portraits exhibited in the plays of the famous battle of the theatres. Jonson defended himself in the character of Crites, that "poor, plain gentleman in black" in *Cynthia's Revels*; while Dekker, and probably Marston, represented themselves as Demetrius and Crispinus in their attack upon Jonson, whom they showed as Horace in *Satiromastix*. The same argument continued in Jonson's *Poetaster* where he embellished his self-portrait by surrounding Horace with distinguished admirers like Virgil, Ovid, and the Emperor Augustus. It appears that satire can have a gentle edge when pointed toward the author and employed in defense of his person and his opinions. But while these characterizations of a scholar as the author are interesting and celebrated, they remain exceptions to the conventional stock type.

## PRIESTS

The interpretation of another cloistered character, the priest, is interesting. In classic plays and early English plays this representative of a common religion is treated with respect, but following the rift between Catholicism and Protestantism a great change is noticeable. Such plays, for instance, as *The Pardoner and the Friar*, *God's Promises*, *The Four PP*, and *New Custom*, are in most part diatribes against the vices of Catholicism. By 1600-1605 the cry against Puritanism is obvious as another subject for diatribe.

A priest, if he is not the butt of direct satire, is conventionally shown as a nefarious agent of either political or romantic intrigue. He counsels, mediates, arranges, he knows all and reveals all. He is willing to lend his robe to an ardent gentleman who can gain entrance to his lady in that disguise. He is also known to stand ready to marry the same ardent gentleman and lady in the space of fifteen minutes. Priests are shown not only as tools but often as arch villains, and perhaps with the inspiration of the evil and overweening Wolsey, the character of "the Cardinal" begins to metamorphose into one of the darkest villains of stage history.

Protestant ministers are not treated with much more respect. Though they appear on the whole to be less vicious, they are certainly more slow-witted. They share much of the priest's desire to mix in secular matters, but it is obvious that the physical nature of their dress precludes many of the romantic and dramatic functions of the robed friar. Their interpretations vary from the delightfully human Sir Nicholas, the vicar in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, who "plays at a game of bowls" or "drinks a pot of ale amongst good fellows," to the hypocritical Parson Shorthose in *Grim the Collier*, who is the mean and licentious suitor of Joan the milkmaid, and as such is treated by the author with far less sympathy than many of the devils in the play.

### *Tradesmen*

One of the most delightful and distinctively Elizabethan characterizations<sup>17</sup> is that of the simple and good-hearted tradesman, and in almost every play at least one is found. The function of such a character varies; often he is used to give atmosphere to a scene, to infuse humor, or to illustrate a maxim of good horse sense. Frequently tradesmen set the background for a hero or heroine. As has been said, Thomas Cromwell, the son of a Putney blacksmith, first appears in his father's shop after the apprentices Hodge, Will, and Tom have discussed their young master's peculiarities and have created considerable suspense for his entrance.

The humble origin of Grissell, as well as her industry and patience, is shown at once by presenting her in company with her father, the basketmaker. An even more symbolic setting for a leading lady is that given the second Lucy in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* who, "chaste and fair and worth her weight in gold," is the daughter of a goldsmith.

Certain tradespeople are shown in scenes with the main char-

<sup>17</sup> Classic plays are not without these characters, such as the Sausage Seller in Aristophanes' *Knights*, the Charcoal Burner in Menander's *Arbitration*, Gripus, the fisherman in Plautus' *Rudens* and so on.

acters to point up or to illustrate particular qualities. The poverty of the student heroes in the second Parnassus play is apparent when in the first scene of the second act a draper, a tailor, an innkeeper, and a tapster enter and bitterly bewail the bills long owed them by these gentlemen. Captain Quintilliano in *May Day* also owes a tailor and a barber, and when these two enter to collect their money, the character of Quintilliano is further clarified by his double ruse of promising to pay the tailor later if he will send his pretty wife to collect the bill "at night." In *The Blind Beggar* there is a similar scene of pursuing creditors: a laundress, an armorer, a vitler, and a carter present their claims to Momford, whose justness and kindness is strikingly evidenced when, to settle his debts, he gives them all the money he has in the world.

The jolly innkeeper conventionally sets the tone of inn scenes: the genial host of the Garter in *The Merry Wives*, Blague, the good host of the George in *The Merry Devil*, even the long-suffering Chamberlain of the Brainford tavern, who tries to oblige all factions in *Westward Ho!* The hardhearted host of the ordinary in *The Royal King*, who finds the ragged Captain and his companion "too lousy" to admit, is a decided exception to the rule of hospitality.

In the initial scene of *Westward Ho!* a tailor is used to carry in his arms the bait for a woman's honor, the gorgeous dress and jewels of a gentlewoman (the trappings which so easily overcome the Country Wench in *Michaelmas Term*). In the former play, however, the Merchant's Wife, with the sly Merchant's assistance, contrives to have her gown and keep her honor too.

The Elizabethan had no scruples in the matter of economy of characters, he employed apprentices and tradesmen in numbers to perform any needed service. One would not expect these agents of minor action to possess personality, but many of them are given quick, deft characterizations, like Kyte, the scrivener who runs on in *All Fools*, and Dustbox, who appears for a moment in *Michaelmas Term*.

Certain services are entrusted to tradesmen in the hope that they

will contribute humor to a scene. Prishall, "the merry cobbler," enlivens the action in *When You See Me*. He sets out as one of a group of incompetent civic volunteers to patrol the dark streets of London, but he determines to take a brief nap first. Upon waking, he is given an angel to carry the message that "the stag of Baydon is clapt in the counter"; in other words, the King himself is telling that he is being arrested and to go for help.

Sometimes professional men are used as agents for matters crucial to the plot. Shakespeare's use of the players, hired to catch the culprits in *Hamlet*, is as practical as the conventional employment of the medical man to finish off personal business of a like nature, and it is dramatically more effective.

Players, as individuals, appear in several satires. In Marston's *Jack Drum's Entertainment* the Tireman and one of the children of Pauls give the apologies for the play. The Tireman also appears in Marston's *What You Will* and in *The Malcontent*, where he is supported by "W. Sly, his cousin Stinklow, D. Burbage and H. Condell." The character of Burbage appears again in the third Parnassus play, in a scene in which he commands Kemp to entertain the audience. When this actor inquires how it may be done, Burbage quickly replies that Kemp's usual face-making will be sufficient diversion for the onlookers. These two characters appear in a later scene, this time Burbage hands out parts for a play. Studioso is to impersonate Hieronimo, and Philomusus, Richard III; as for Kemp, Burbage informs him that he must perform his stock scene of indecision, the pantomime in which he considers first the desires of one hand and then the other hand, and then the probable destination of one foot and then the other foot.

Certain tradesmen have major parts in their own right, like Barnabe Bunch, the English botcher or mender of hose in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*. Barnabe appears in the second scene in France, which country he proceeds to compare unfavorably to the fair land of his birth. In a homesick way he cites Britain's many virtues, not the least of which is its good brown ale. Barnabe is a merry, simple, honest tradesman. When war strikes, he allies him-

self to the hero, the Duke of Bullen, whose ubiquitous qualities place considerable responsibility upon the shoulders of loyal Barnabe. Without Bunch's presence, the audience would not only be deprived of welcome humor, but the author would be hard pressed with the deficiencies of his plot.

Cockadilo, the King's barber in *The Noble Soldier*, was obviously created to fill the same two needs, but his characterization has in no way been so successful. Despite the author's desires, he seems to have no connection with the plot of this somber piece, and he has no personality beyond the costume of his profession. The news, first, that he is to be married to the King's jilted fiancée, and later, that he is to escort the Queen back to Italy, is a clear indication that the Elizabethans did not hesitate in accepting action which a twentieth century audience would criticize as being devoid of logical explanation.

#### MERCHANTS

An important character is not infrequently presented as a merchant, this particular profession being chosen either with the hope of accentuating certain qualities of personality or of facilitating the action. A distinction should be made between the wealthy and important merchants and the petty merchants or tradesmen. Frescobald in *Thomas Lord Cromwell* is one of the former, a man of stature though the nature of his business makes his fortune precarious. Frescobald is an honorable and generous friend. It is his temporary financial embarrassment, not a change of feeling, which prevents him at the particular time from giving Cromwell the support which he has promised. Albano, the husband of the heroine in *What You Will*, is also a wealthy merchant, his profession doubtless chosen to account for his departure to distant lands and his long absence from home. Merchant gentlemen of this caliber are treated in a respectful way, not the slightly contemptuous or at least indulgent manner in which simple tradesmen are handled, the husbands in *Westward Ho!* for instance, Masters Justiniano, Honissuckle, and Wafer, who are all typical London shopkeepers.

The fourth husband in this play is Master Tenterhook, a broker, and he is represented in much the same light and ridiculous way as the broker, Master Fripper, in *May Day*. The large-scale money-lender, the usurer, is of course a more sinister character. He is traditionally evil and usually possesses Pantalone attributes. He is portrayed in this conventional manner by Gripe, the main character in *Wily Beguiled*, who in the end, as is commonly the case, loses both his daughter and his gold. The heartless Bago, the usurer in *Thomas Cromwell*, is the moving force of the plot, until the in-escapable denouement, at which time he is forced to disappear from the action.

Undoubtedly, the satire of these familiar types gave amusement to a London audience made up in large part of tradesmen. Today, the characters are doubly entertaining as lifelike sixteenth century portraits.

### *Soldiers*

In the Elizabethan theatre the soldier is a stock character with a dual personality: the noble soldier and the cowardly braggart. In any era the interpretation of the soldier seems to follow the fashion of popular opinion, which means that in time of war, the army is considered the noblest profession, and in times of peace, the most useless. When gallant soldiers appear in plays during a time of peace they are apt to be referred to as "the old type," meaning the type which established the peace currently enjoyed. Heywood bitterly complains that the worthy profession of arms has fallen into disrespect, and his play *The Four Prentices*, he states, is an attempt to restore the cause of arms to its rightfully exalted position. Though there are several examples of the idealized type of soldier, the popular trend at the time considered is toward the satiric interpretation of the soldier as an object of ridicule.

By 1600 the profession of soldiering had fallen into desuetude. The city of London, as has been said, was filled with discharged soldiers, and their disturbing presence was sharply felt. When seri-

ously considered, this vast number of demobilized men presented a great hazard to the national economy, and when lightly considered it presented a ready source for comic interpretation. Satirists saw the soldier with the cold eye of Aristophanes, who had portrayed the pig-headed militarist in *The Acharnians* and the greedy war profiteers in *Peace*. Writers of comedy turned to Plautine braggarts like Therapontigonus, Pyropolynices, and Antamoenides or to the gulls like Plautus' Stratophanes and Terence's Thraso. They also turned to the descendant of these braggarts, the Spanish Captain of the *Commedia*, the boastful, swash-buckling, dull-witted coward, full of great talk and little action.

The "emphatical," filthy and smelly Captain Foulweather in *Sir Giles Goosecap* is such a character, and he follows true to type by being unsuccessful in love. Lazarillo, the Spanish soldier of fortune in *Blurt Master Constable* is a similar characterization and like the other two is hounded by poverty. Captain Quintilliano in *May Day* is another loud and long-talking braggadocio whose martial prowess is limited to his description of a banquet in terms of a battle. Like the others, and wholly without cause, he believes that he is irresistible to the ladies.

The most disputed personification of the fighting man is of course Sir John Falstaff. He enjoys his greatest activity before this particular period, that is between 1596 and 1598, though he is seen toward the end of his career in *The Merry Wives*, one of the plays under consideration. It is interesting to note his characterization for a moment because every conceivable interpretation has been made of this "succulent old sinner," from the romantic tradition established by Maurice Morgann in 1777,<sup>18</sup> who argued that Falstaff was no coward at all, to the counter-romantic movement led by Professor Stoll, who claims that "the huge bombard" was a Plautine braggart pure and simple. Mr. Dover Wilson sums up the case with a show of his usual ingenuity in *The Fortunes of Falstaff* by saying that, undeniably, there are traces of the Plautine braggart in his character, not so completely shown as in Pistol and

<sup>18</sup> Morgann, *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*.

Parolles in *All's Well*, but there, just the same. However, Mr. Wilson continues, there are differences. The swaggering Captain is a "sham" soldier while Falstaff is an "old" soldier, and though being an "old" soldier does not necessarily prove, as Morgann claims it does, that he was a "good" soldier when young; the fact that he was not considered a coward is shown by his not being given the traditional coward's punishment either at Gad's Hill or elsewhere. Mr. Wilson's explanation is that Falstaff is the humanization of the soldier type, a tolerable fighter when he is put to it, though like most men he fights no longer than he has to, or at all if he can avoid it. His cowardly love of life and his instincts for self-preservation are indeed human, and they supply much of the appeal of the Falstaff character. Mr. Wilson goes so far as to say that the play of *Henry IV* is a prodigal son play, with Prince Hal personifying the prodigal; Hotspur, chivalry; and Falstaff, vanity, vice, and the devil. Thus, he says, Shakespeare humanizes the devil of the moralities.

There are several interpretations of the other type, the noble soldier; the simplest shows him as a blunt, bold warrior, whose only love is battle. Guy, one of Heywood's four prentices, voices the philosophy of this martial character:

I love to see my face besmeared in blood  
 To have a gaping wound upon my flesh  
 I love no chamber music but the drum.

• • •  
 To lie all night within a sheet of mail.

• • •  
 And hear no language but of blood and wars  
 Such is my life, such may my honor prove.  
 Make War a lady, I that lady love.<sup>19</sup>

The Earl of Pembroke in the anonymous *Trial of Chivalry* could easily have uttered the same words. This paragon of rough but aristocratic virtue would be successful in love if he deigned to notice a Princess' affection, but he is impervious to such weakness.

<sup>19</sup> Heywood, *The Foure Prentices of London*, C2 verso.

Pembroke's sentiments are lustily and crudely echoed by Cavaliero Dick Bowyer, an Englishman of low rank but high mettle, who accompanies his lord to France and assists him in all his undertakings. In the *Alarum for London*, a common soldier of lowly mold is characterized in the person of Stump. In this instance, Stump, a maimed veteran, is not the attendant of a great soldier, but is himself the only champion of the city's defense. The Captain in *The Royal King* is interesting in that his characterization is basically that of the aristocratic leader, but to all outward appearances he is a poor and ordinary soldier. He arrives in tatters, "a veritable rag of honor," his only possessions his noble thoughts and gallant deeds; which commodities, he soon finds, will keep no man from starving. This state of poverty, which renders him unrecognizable to his intimates, was undoubtedly recognized at once by Elizabethan theatre-goers as an ingenious method of providing a disguise for a man who will proceed to test the virtue of his friends.

Rowley's Noble Soldier in the play of that title is a straightforward representation of the bold leader. Balthazar is an onlooker who has an unselfish interest in straightening out the affairs of the Spanish court. This play, like several others, is laid during the famous war with Portugal, and the impersonal hero, the Noble Soldier, is a Moor. Eleazar, the villain-hero of *Lust's Dominion*, is also a Moor. He is a brave soldier, but is an ambitious, unscrupulous, and thoroughly evil man. Eleazar represents the conflicting good and evil qualities in a warrior, later brilliantly portrayed in *Macbeth*.

Othello, the most famous Moor in dramatic history, is not a monstrous villain, he is a brave soldier and a good man. His fatal flaw is his jealousy. Though one shudders at the hideous crime which he finally commits, one feels sympathy for him, and pity. Many critics have argued the intricacies of Othello's psychology, just as they have debated the exact color of his skin, but none has given a more ingenious explanation of the whole play than Miss Lilian Winstanley, who argues in a monograph<sup>20</sup> that the drama

<sup>20</sup> *Othello as the Tragedy of Italy*, London, 1924.

is a symbolic story of the overthrow of the last Italian city of Venice (Desdemona) by Spain (Othello). There is undoubtedly considerable allegorical reference of contemporary significance in any literature. It is found in plays today and it can safely be assumed to have existed in greater measure in the time of Elizabeth, when elaborate allegories were in fashion. However, even granting this, it would appear to anyone interested in the fundamental structure of plays that a prolonged consideration of word figures would not only be an unwarranted stressing of points which the author had no notion of emphasizing, but probably also the neat interpretation of many meanings of which he himself had no conception. Shakespeare was a practical man of the theatre; he was not given to long-sustained allegories. These are not the mark of a creative writer but of a dogged student, for only he has the necessary interest and endurance to develop them.

### *Supernatural Characters*

One of the testimonies to the influence of the classic theatre upon the Elizabethan is the happy and natural mixture of ancient mythology and Elizabethan fantasy. The virtues and vices, devils and spirits of the moralities mingle unconcernedly with gods and goddesses, nymphs and muses. The correct Fulke Greville in *Alaham* does not hesitate to present a chorus composed of such conglomerate figures as "Good Spirits, Evil Spirits, Furies, Malice, Craft, Corrupt Reason and People." And another academic author, Thomas Tomkis, in *Lingua*, in the scene where the Senses strive for superiority, casually sets off Bacchus and Ceres with the God of Tobacco. Devils are found to be tantamount to Furies and are used interchangeably with them. Similarly, the Muses and the Charities are frequently allowed to represent each other, and in *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, the stage directions sometimes call these characters by one name and sometimes by the other.

Another convention, both classic and Elizabethan, was the nonchalant mingling of supernatural characters with human beings.

These imaginary creatures sing and dance their way through many Elizabethan comedies hand in hand with men of solid flesh. Frequently, they have special duties to perform, such as a necessary miracle in the action or an *entre acte* entertainment, or an atmospheric effect, or a time cover.

In *Lust's Dominion* the appearance of the fairies for the first and only time, immediately after Maria has fought off the King and poured a death potion in his cup, seems inappropriate and puzzling until one realizes that they are serving the purpose of a time cover. The long years between Act I and Act II of *The Thracian Wonder* are handled even more abruptly by having the character of Father Time walk on, speak a few lines, and turn his glass. One remembers that Shakespeare employs this same device in IV, 1, of *The Winter's Tale* to "slide o'er sixteen years."

There are several reasons why the gods and their supernatural agents were important characters in both Greek tragedy and comedy. In tragedy their presence lent dignity, and in many cases, terror, for they were known to have the power to prophesy and to move men like pawns according to divine whim, tempting them, torturing them, and ultimately destroying them. They could control men unseen or they could encounter them in actual conflict on the stage.

In comedy, the gods lost much of their terror and also much of their dignity, but they remained, none the less, good dramatic material. Triballus and Heracles are eminently effective characters in Aristophanes *The Birds*. Triballus is a ridiculous and barbarous Thracian deity whose gibberish no one can understand, and Heracles, who appears with him, is shown as a loutish brute whose only interest in the peace embassy is the banquet for the ambassadors. Old Neptune, the third member of the mission and chaperone to the others, is notably lacking in his customary dignity.

Even the highest god was thought a fit subject for comic treatment, as seen in Plautus' *Amphitryon*, an adaptation of an older Greek play. This tale of Jupiter and Mercury's eventful night in Thebes has been so popular with playgoers of all eras that it has

undergone thirty-eight alterations to date, and will undoubtedly enjoy many more.

Gods and supernatural beings were the masters of the Greek theatre. Not only were they expected to provoke the action of a drama, but their whims were expected to bring about the denouement. This was either demonstrated by logic or by the employment of the conventional Deus ex Machina. This easy device was, in the later theatre, used so unsparingly and with such a lack of imagination that its effectiveness was exhausted. Elizabethans openly scoffed at the device as an avoidance of good plotting. Writers held strongly to the concept originally stated by Aristotle that a play should be composed of situations provoked by the characters themselves, one situation leading to another until a climax was reached, with the denouement based on the grounds of logic. The Elizabethans forced the gods into a secondary place, either as atmosphere or as simple participants on the same footing as mortals. The gods were no longer the divine rulers of dramatic action and the secret agents of the author.

#### GHOSTS

One of the most effective characters in Elizabethan melodrama is the ghost. It is interesting to trace the development of this unhappy spirit through Greek tragedy. Aeschylus employs the ghost of Darius in his tragedy *The Persians*, but the function of this character differs from that familiar to Elizabethan tragedy. His initial and only appearance is late, in the last scene, following the messenger's report of his son Xerxes' crushing defeat and the chorus' lament. At this moment, the ghost of Darius appears from the grave, joins in the general lamentation, and gives a valediction of misery.

The ghost of Clytemnestra in Sophocles' *Eumenides* is more like the Elizabethan ghost of revenge. She appears conventionally, at the beginning of the action, uttering a personal lamentation. She awakens the furies and commands them to harass Orestes. The ghost of Polydorus in Euripides' *Hecuba* has even more resem-

blance to the Elizabethan spirit. This young son of Hecuba and Priam, freshly murdered, begins the play by "appearing," detailing the exposition of past action, describing the horror of his murder, and lamenting the manner in which his body was thrown into the sea without the rights of burial. He makes dire prophecies and, as he "vanishes," the action begins.

Seneca's ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon* "appears" unwillingly, laments the tragedy of his murder, and prophesies the evils about to take place. He sets the time and place, introduces the characters, delivers the necessary exposition and then "vanishes," and, as is customary, never returns. Tantalus, his son, is the ghost in Seneca's tragedy entitled *Thyestes*, and this spirit likewise comes forth unwillingly, lamentingly. In this case, as to a minor extent in *The Eumenides*, the action with the ghost is a dialogue scene, rather than a monologue. Megaera, the relentless fury, stands beside Tantalus and refuses to let his own suffering end his punishment. She threatens him with her torch and writhing snakes, and makes him bring further tragedy upon his blood-drenched house.

Greville's "Ghost of an old murdered King of Ormus" in *Alaham* follows the general classic pattern. This ghost begins the play by coming forward, lamenting, prophesying, and delivering an extensive exposition. After calling upon the furies to unleash the powers of iniquity, he vanishes forever. However, this particular prologue lacks the excitement of any of the classic prologues cited, because the ghost has no emotional tie with any of the characters in the play.

The difference between this impersonal type of spirit and the famous ghost of Hamlet's father, is obvious. In *Hamlet*, the atmosphere surrounding the ghost is fraught with excitement, suspense, and danger. The ghost's murder is the matter of the play. All business pertaining to the ghost is handled with artistry. The apparition does not enter alone, announce himself like a prologue, lament, prophesy, and then vanish forever. Mystery and suspense are created and the ghost is given one of the greatest entrances in stage history. When the spirit finally appears, he strengthens the sus-

pense by not speaking. He vanishes and reappears in another scene. This time he does not deliver all the necessary exposition in a lump as is customary, but gives it in fragments, tantalizingly, slowly. The apparition appears once again, late in the play, to Hamlet. This ghost is a character in his own right, as Professor Schelling says, "a ghost with a personality."

Chettle was clever enough not to attempt an anticlimactic repetition of this character in *Hoffman*. Chettle was content with the horror and suspense of showing to the audience the bones of Hoffman's murdered father in the first scene, and of letting these hideous objects lie on stage behind a rock throughout the action, haunting the audience, until the obligatory moment when he makes their discovery provoke the climax of the play.

The character of the ghost tends as time goes on to become more objective and more integrated with the plot. This is particularly true in comedy. Here there are several instances of humorous ghosts—or perhaps they are more appropriately termed human apparitions, since they are characters in the play who are agents of the action. The audience is fully aware of the fact that these characters are mock-ghosts, and, knowing this, takes pleasure in watching, with a superior air, one or more fools being duped and frightened. In *The Merry Devil* there is every indication that a good idea was presented during the rehearsals or during the playing, for the character who is designated in the first scene of the quarto text as a blacksmith is suddenly transformed into a miller, obviously to permit the business which comes in scene 10 when the hunters of illegal deer and love are frightened off by an apparition in white clothes.

Far more complicated business is devised for the scene in the bawdy house in *Blurt Master Constable*. The lecherous Spaniard, Lazarillo, is convinced that his room is haunted, and the audience takes secret pleasure in knowing that the "spirits" who haunt him are characters in the play in league for that purpose. The climax of the scene, which the audience eagerly anticipates, comes when Lazarillo undresses and lies down on the bed. This, it turns ~~out~~

has been laid on top of a trap door and he falls through it precipitously, on to the street.

The desire for a literal interpretation and the self-consciousness of a sophisticated theatre did more than anything else to banish supernatural characters from the realm of so-called "straight plays" to the separate enclosure of fantasy where they are found today. This strict separation is to be deprecated, for, despite a consciousness of their unreality, every theatre-goer accepts the existence of imaginative beings.

### *Advice to the Elizabethan Playwright*

This examination of the types of characters appearing most often in the productions of the years under consideration makes possible the formulation of certain definite rules for the aspiring Elizabethan playwright. The first advice is that, before he decides upon his *dramatis personae*, he should consider the drives which prompt protagonists to action. These have been discussed in the preceding chapter, and can be summed up as being few and personal: first, the basic desire to live; and second, the desire to make one's life more enjoyable through the acquisition of power, position, wealth, fame (or in a rare case, the desire to improve the lot of others); third, the desire to win love, keep love, test love, discard it or revenge it.

Any emotion arising from these desires is a good choice and one easy to personify in the main character. This protagonist should be given as a foil, a character based upon a strong and directly opposite emotion. Among the familiar opposites which come to mind are the ardent suitor and the indifferent maid, the profligate husband and the loyal wife, the patient husband and the termagant wife, the ambitious upstart and the Christian prince, the devil and the saint, the avaricious old man and the gay deceiver, the scheming father and the rebellious son.

To fulfill the demands of the struggle provoked by these two characters, certain others should be chosen to aid the hero and

others to oppose him: a loyal maid, an obdurate father, an ambitious mother, an eavesdropping relation, a hotheaded friend, an eager widow, an angry courtezan—these are a few among the many choices. If an author wishes in a particular scene to create an atmosphere of pathos, he can depend upon the effective character of a tender infant, a heartbroken maid, or a blind old man.

An author is in the prevailing fashion if he gives a secondary character the attributes of a fool or a rustic, a ridiculous foreigner, a light-footed effeminate or a pettifogging lawyer, an ignorant pedant, a brazen thief or a scurrilous priest, a cowardly soldier or a rough, honest tradesman.

In choosing utility characters, the dramatist doubtless prefers to employ active rather than inactive agents, for the narrators and commentators, the chorus and nuncius are relics of an old technique, essentially undramatic figures who clog the action and render it artificial. The responsibilities once given to the chorus are now expected to be undertaken by characters who are involved in the plot: outspoken fools, guileless confidantes, and soliloquizers, who reveal the secrets of their souls. The nuncius, whose important expository lines were delivered in a vacuum, is commonly replaced by a character who has been seen before and will be seen again, one who comes from a place that can be visualized, in a human manner of locomotion, and is bound for some reasonable destination. Often these bearers of tidings are pages, servants, nurses, ladies' maids, and travelers, who are able with ease to bring messages and to carry news or gossip, and to assist in the movement of the plot. They are agents of the plot; and a playwright should be counseled to consider them, no matter how minor their function may be, as worthy of a name and of a personality.

Before concluding the advice on the subject of characters, a word of warning should be given concerning the suggested treatment in different genres. It would be wise, for instance, to keep the leading participants in tragedy of high caste, because the horror of a man's ruin is measured by the height of his fall. An aristocratic setting adds solemnity to tragedy and strength to its catharsis. Simple peo-

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ple, on the other hand, are the best subjects for comedy. For satire, both the simple and the great are conventional targets for derision.

An Elizabethan with a flair for satire would do well to study the brilliant portrayals of Jonson. One favoring a more realistic interpretation, should study the characters of Middleton, that "excellent Hogarthian." An author with a talent for romance, should study the treatment of Shakespeare, who showers sympathy on all and makes his characters so living that in many cases their names become synonymous with the type they symbolize.





## *CHAPTER IV*

# Beginning

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### *Ways to Begin a Play*

**N** any era, after a writer has chosen his theme and his characters and has decided whether the play will be pure tragedy, pure comedy, or a mixture, he has the pleasure of visualizing the production in his mind. A play in the mind is a real pleasure, not infrequently the greatest which an author is likely to enjoy, since it appears to be humanly impossible to think about such a project without also thinking about how enthusiastically it will be received by the audience.

When the moment comes for writing, however, this pleasant fancy vanishes, and the author is faced with his challenge. Once he begins, he admits failure if he turns back, and he constantly risks failure by proceeding. The idea of the play is no longer a delight; in the process of creation it becomes a torment.

There are several ways to begin a play and all of them are familiar. The first is by a prologue which is essentially an introduction to a play, separate from the main body of its action. The original function of a prologue was expository. It permitted the author to tell his audience the story up to the point where he turned it over to

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the actors. The prologue could be delivered by an impersonal character, often one simply called "Prologus," or it could be given by a character who had a closer bond with the audience, one of the characters who would later play an active role. The virtue of a prologue is that the exposition can be quickly dispatched, thereby allowing the action of the play to begin at once. Its disadvantage is that it breaks the spell of realism. However, some compensation for this blemish rests in the fact that such a device enlists the hearers' cooperation in the venture.

A dramatist can also begin a play with a pantomime or "dumb show" as in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*. This form of opening would undoubtedly have been more popular if it were not for the limitations inherent in exposition by signs and symbols. Dumb show is more practical as a narrative device later in the course of the action, after the characters have been established in their roles, and the properties and symbols which are necessary adjuncts provide ready identification. Pantomime, however, combined with a few speeches, always has possibilities as an effective beginning, though the noise and movement of an entering procession and a stage alive with many actors make it difficult to convey any but the simplest facts of exposition.

A variation of the mass opening is the recitation by a chorus. The two earliest plays of Aeschylus begin in this fashion, while the remaining five start either with a soliloquy or with an expository dialogue. The choral opening is an indication of an early theatre, reflecting the conventions of mass ceremonies such as prompted the rise of the Greek drama from religious festivals, and the early English drama from the ceremonies of the Christian Church.

The effective first scene of *Macbeth*, enacted by the witches, is choral in effect though the weird sisters' lines are separate speeches, not uttered in unison until the eleventh and last line. This brief scene cannot be said to be highly expository, for the only facts conveyed are that ere set of sun, upon the heath, they'll meet Macbeth. Nevertheless the value of the scene atmospherically is unquestioned, and it is known to hold its own even in the most novel

cut-and-reshuffled versions of the story. In several Elizabethan plays allegorical figures like Love and Fortune and Death are presented in the first scene. They introduce the argument, and toward the end of the scene they inform the audience that they will remain as a chorus to comment between the acts of the play.

The easy and expeditious soliloquy beginning is one in which an actor, usually a main character, marches on and briskly tells the story of the antecedent action. When the pertinent facts have been revealed, another character or characters join him and the action commences.

Dialogue exposition is a form more frequently employed in both the classic and Elizabethan theatre than is realized. Two or more actors, either important or insignificant persons in the play, like the tiresome "First" and "Second Gentlemen," come on the stage, sometimes accompanied by a mute or several mutes. They proceed to indulge in talk, pointed by the author in such a way as to reveal the necessary information about the main character, the force of his opposition, and the general situation. One of the main benefits of exposition by characters not including the chief protagonist is that suspense and interest are created for the hero by talk about him. The importance of his subsequent entrance is heightened immeasurably by this device. In talking, the characters employ either stylized, artificial terms or the idioms of natural conversation.

The latter form is the one generally accepted in the twentieth century. Obviously, however, the more the quality of naturalness is stressed, the longer it takes to present the necessary facts through ordinary conversation. Since in the present theatre it is also the fashion to concentrate in the opening scene upon atmosphere, characterization, and witty repartee, exposition is further retarded. One of the weaknesses of twentieth century plays is that the author so carefully juggles all these details that by the time they are dispatched he is too exhausted to create the action, which after all is the meat and meaning of a play.

In considering the beginnings of Elizabethan plays, it is well to have clearly in mind the practice of dramatists before the sixteenth

century. For a comprehensive picture one should go back to the classic writers who established many conventions which the Elizabethans consciously or unconsciously accepted and which profoundly affected their play form.

### *Conventions of Exposition in Greek Plays*

Aristotle's statement in *The Art of Poetry* that tragedy is comprised of six parts, the first of which is the "Prologue," is misleading to anyone who conceives of a prologue as it has just been defined (an introductory exposition set apart from the action of the play), because none of the extant tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides has such a preface.

The choral beginning has already been noted in the case of the two earliest plays of Aeschylus, while in *Rhesus*, which is attributed to Euripides, an innovation of this form is shown. *Rhesus* begins with a chorus of Trojan guards calling, by various voices, for Hector to come forth from his tent. The scene is remarkable for the realistic quality which its short staccato lines convey. The choral effect is principally atmospheric, however, since Hector appears before any real exposition has been given, and it is he who posts the audience about the siege of Troy, amid the din of confused chanting. In Euripides' *Suppliants*, the chorus is also initially present, but it, too, is chiefly atmospheric in function, the exposition being delivered in a long monologue by Theseus' mother.

Some Greek plays begin with the marching on of a "crowd," not to be confused with the chorus, since they are seen but not heard. One of the leading characters at once steps forward from this group and speaks, briefly delivering the exposition. This is true in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. However, though the processions add life and color, they do not structurally change the business of the scene.

Aeschylus begins two plays by soliloquy. The Watchman on the roof of the palace delivers the long expository speech in *Agamemnon* before the chorus of Argive elders enters singing.

And in *The Eumenides* a similar speech is given by a priestess of Apollo who also leaves the stage before the major actors and the chorus of furies appear. Inasmuch as neither of these two characters takes any further part in the action, the beginning may be said to be separated from the scene which follows: however, the stage movement flows on logically and uninterruptedly after their exits and the strict convention limiting the number of characters may well be the reason for their failure to reappear. Both prologists are persons closely related to the plot and not the abstraction which is commonly thought to be embodied in this figure.

Aeschylus' two other plays open with dialogue. In *Prometheus Bound* Hephaestus enters with Power and Force, who are carrying the captive Prometheus. Though all these actors are on the stage, only two of them speak, Power and Hephaestus, and it is not until they have gone that Prometheus chants, alone, and the chorus enters, drawn in a winged car. Force has never spoken and would appear to be chiefly needed to help Power carry Prometheus. In *The Choephoroi* two characters enter, Orestes and his friend Pylades, and, as they approach the grave of Agamemnon, Orestes speaks. Pylades stands mute throughout the scene, his quiet presence adding a certain note of reality. This same colorless character, incidentally, appears and also stands mute in Sophocles' first scene of *Electra*, a play which deals with the same events. In this version Orestes receives the necessary knowledge of past happenings through a conversation with Paedagogus, his old attendant. In Sophocles' *Philoctetes* a mute attendant is present during the conversation between Ulysses and Neoptolemus, obviously for the purpose to which he is soon put, that of spying on the cave of the wounded and long-suffering hero.

Sophocles consistently adheres to a dialogue beginning, sometimes adding a second encounter scene by the entrance of a third character, Heracles' son in *The Trachinae*, and the Stranger in *Oedipus at Colonus*. After these three have spoken briefly they all walk from the stage and the chorus enters. The only exception to this rule has been noted in *Oedipus the King*, where a crowd of

suppliants, old men, youths, and young children are seated on the altar steps. None of these characters speak, however, and the play begins with the usual dialogue scene, in this case between Oedipus and the Priest of Zeus. The third character, Creon, enters shortly, and after this new encounter scene, all go out and the chorus enters according to the familiar pattern.

The difference in Euripides' exposition is at once startling. Because of his later popularity and influence his method is commonly thought of as the "Classic style." With the exception of *The Suppliants*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Heracles*, and the doubtful *Rhesus*, all his surviving plays begin with soliloquies. In some cases the character speaking is not alone: Hecuba lies sleeping on the ground in *The Trojan Women*; and Orestes, in the play of that title, sleeps on a couch while Electra delivers the long first speech; and the children of Heracles are mute participants in *The Heracleidae*. The tragedy of *Heracles* is the only play which Euripides begins with a dialogue. Here, Megara, the wife of Heracles enters with her sons, accompanied by her anomalous relative, Amphitryon. However, though the scene is ostensibly a dialogue between Amphitryon and Megara, after his long, first speech which makes explicit the fact that they are all at the point of being slain, there is no further need for exposition by Megara. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, a play which remained unfinished at the time of Euripides' death and was completed by his son, is interesting in that it has two different beginnings. The first is a dialogue between Agamemnon and an Old Servant, the other a long speech delivered by Menelaus, which if placed first would serve to give the exposition in the more usual soliloquy form.

In *Alcestis*, *Hippolytus*, *The Trojan Women*, *Ion*, and *The Bacchae* the soliloquies are delivered by a god. Only once does this role fall to a ghost, that of Polydorus, the murdered son of Troy in the tragedy of *Hecuba*, but this spirit, together with the Senecan ghost of Tantalus and Thyestes, left such a profound impression upon Elizabethan dramatists that the term "Classic Ghost" became a cliché.

Soliloquies are often given by the title character, as in *Andromache*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Helen*. In *The Phoenissae* (which is the same story of the curse upon the house of Oedipus that Aeschylus treated in his *Seven Against Thebes* and Sophocles in his *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*), the monologue is delivered by Jocasta, here strikingly shown as the aged mother-wife of Oedipus. More lowly characters are sometimes allowed to deliver the long opening speeches—the Nurse in *Medea*, the Peasant in *Electra*, and the enslaved Silenus in the only extant satyr-play, *The Cyclops*.

In Euripides the opening is nowhere termed a prologue and thus set apart from the action; and in all the initial soliloquies, with the exception of the ghost, the actor chosen to deliver the prologue is intimately connected with the action which flows on, logically and uninterruptedly, after this first speech. This subsequent action follows the general pattern mentioned in connection with Sophocles, the most simple form being the entrance of a second or third character for the dialogue scene, after which all characters leave the stage and the chorus enters. In Euripides a freedom in the handling of the chorus is noted. It may accompany the first character on, or, as in *Hippolytus* and *Hecuba*, it may enter immediately after the “disappearance” of the first character. If the chorus comes at the conventional time, at the conclusion of the dialogue scene, it may either take the stage to itself or continue the argument with the characters who remain. In his handling of the chorus, as well as in his attempt to portray emotion realistically through characterization and speech, Euripides shows a marked independence and flexibility in his treatment of the established play form.

Turning from Greek tragedy to comedy, one discovers that none of the plays of Aristophanes have any so-termed “Prologues.” With two exceptions, all begin with dialogue. The first exception is the rambling soliloquy of Dicaeopolis, the good citizen in *The Acharnians*, the earliest comedy of Aristophanes which has come down to us. This idealistic Athenian, failing to achieve any success in persuading the Assembly to make peace with Sparta, negotiates

a private truce for himself and his family. The second instance occurs in the considerably later play, *The Ecclesiazusae*, in which Praxagora, an Athenian matron, soliloquizes briefly as she waits for her fellow conspirators to don the clothes and false beards of their husbands and take over the helm of the state for its betterment. An exactly parallel opening is that which finds Lysistrata also waiting for her female conspirators, who are going to overcome the men by more feminine methods. In *Lysistrata*, the heroine's opening speech is limited to four lines; these are hardly sufficient to constitute a soliloquy beginning, particularly since no exposition is revealed until the entrance of Cleonicé, at which time the regular dialogue pattern is followed.

Aristophanes found very pleasing the beginning dialogue between two saucy slaves who discuss their masters. This is mentioned so that no supposition will arise that this device is a modern invention. In *Peace*, *The Knights*, and *The Wasps* gossiping slaves hold forth, and in the last case the humor of the situation is emphasized by the fact that Xanthias, one of the two slaves guarding Bidelycleon's law-crazed father in a net, keeps falling asleep.

Slaves carry on dialogue with their masters in two of the other plays, *The Frogs* and *Plutus*, and they succeed in enlivening the necessary exposition with humor. In the remaining three plays the dialogue is between two of the leading characters: the Athenian idealists who plan to establish the perfect state in *The Birds*; Euripides and his ridiculous father-in-law in *The Thesmophoriazusae*; and the stupid old man and his profligate son in *The Clouds*. Here, the son cannot forbear talking about horse racing even in his sleep. This humorous touch of comment from a sleeper was repeated, as has been mentioned, in *The Wasps*; one wonders if the quiet sleepers in the plays of Euripides were a possible inspiration.

### *Exposition in Roman Plays*

In Roman comedy a great change can be seen in the form of exposition. Plautus specifies a "Prologue" in all but a few of his comedies,

and even in the five plays which appear to be without them, three have prologues in all but name, like the *Mercator*, which begins with a direct soliloquy by the romantic young lover who enters from his house and accosts the audience with, "I'm now going to kill two birds with one stone: I'll tell you both the plot of our play and about my love affair." He is as good as his word and in record time performs all the functions of the conventional prologue.

The designated "Prologues" are set apart from the action. Sometimes the speaker goes by no other name than "Prologus" though in other cases he is an actor in the play, not infrequently a god, if one is involved in the story. One prologue, that in the *Trinummus* stands out; it is an allegorical scene, complete in itself. Luxury dispatches her daughter, Poverty, to a certain house, with the remark that the young man living there has just succeeded in wasting his father's fortune. The employment of an independent scene as a prologue is an unusual practice for Roman comedy, and it is interesting to note because the device is one common to Elizabethan plays.

Plautus' conventional beginning is a prologue, delivered by a single speaker. Whoever this person may be, it is his responsibility to give the name of the original Greek play, the name of the old author, and the new title "as Maccius has now translated it." The prologuist hastens to assure the audience that the new play is "full of wit and mirth," and he proceeds to give a generous and detailed description of the plot. Prologus in *Menaechmi* says, "The plot I'll generously pour out, not merely by the peck or bushel but by the whole barn, so kindly a nature have I for telling the plot." The prologuist customarily sets the time and place, as Mercury does in *Amphitryon*: "And now attend: I will relate the plot. The city's Thebes; and in that house there dwells Amphitryon." Mercury further obliges the audience with the information that he will wear "a plume upon [his] hat" to distinguish him from Sosia, Amphitryon's slave; while Jupiter will "wear a tassel under his" to distinguish him from Amphitryon. "But these marks," he tells the audience, "no one will see but you alone."

The Plautine prologue customarily ends with a request for

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quiet and courteous attention, a plea familiar in Elizabethan prologues. The disturbances created by his audience plagued Plautus, and he often speaks sternly. The prologist in *Poenulus* tells the crowd that "those who have had a long, leisurely nap at home should now cheerfully stand, or at least refrain from sleeping . . . let the nurses keep tiny children at home and not bring them to see the play . . . and let matrons view the play in silence, laugh in silence, refrain from tinkling tones of chatter."

A study of the beginnings of plays is also a study of the relations existing between the author and the audience of a certain period. It is obvious that between the time of Plautus (254-184 B.C.) and Terence (c. 195-159 B.C.) the relationship of the public and the theatre did not improve. This is reflected by a marked difference in the tone of Terence's prologues. In all of his six extant plays these are dedicated to a purpose other than exposition. They are shorter, on the whole, than the prologues of Plautus; they do not detail the plot, but are a personal defense of the intentions and the character and the art of the author. All except *Hecyra* and the *Adelphoe* refer specifically to "that spiteful old poet" Luscius Lanuvius, who by his ungrounded charges has tried to drive "our poet from his work and make him starve." Terence, like Plautus in his prologues, documents his story by saying that this is such a play from the Greek, called by such a name and now translated and newly entitled. He explains in *Andria* that he has mingled two plots together and he defends this action by saying that "his enemies blame him for having done this, and maintain that it is wrong to mix plays together. Does not this affectation of learning show that they know nothing about the matter? When they blame him, they are blaming Naevius, Plautus and Ennius, whom our poet can appeal to as having done the same thing. He wishes rather to rival their fine carelessness than the obscure and minute pedantry of his detractors; and what is more I warn them to hold their peace for the future and leave off abusing him, or they will find their own misdeeds published. Favor us with silence; listen impartially and weigh the facts of the case." This insistent plea for a quiet hearing gives a clear

indication of the public's preference for other forms of entertainment.

Terence's interesting comedy *Hecyra*, further demonstrates this by the two prologues it bears. The first attests to the fact that the play failed at its initial performance "so full were the silly people's heads of a rope-dancer." However, this plea for a quiet and decent hearing was obviously not heeded, for a second prologue relates that this performance was also ruined "after the first act," when "a rumor spread through the audience that a show of gladiators was going to be exhibited, whereupon, rioting, shouting and fighting for places, the populace hurried off together" and thus, the prologist makes a final and pathetic plea, "do not let the author, who has entrusted (this prologue to me, an old actor) be undeservedly discomfited and put to shame by his enemies. Listen to this plea for my sake, and grant silence, that other authors may be encouraged to write for the stage, and it may be worth my while to bring out new plays hereafter at my own expense."

If the relationship between author and audience were touchy in Terence's day, it was thoroughly hostile by the time of Seneca, who was born a hundred and ninety years later. By then the public, delighting in spectacles of violence and brutality, had openly declared its preference for gladiatorial contests and sea fights. The removal of public sponsorship from the theatre would presumably offer grave problems to the dramatist. In this dilemma Seneca might be expected to compete with the popular spectacle form by embodying the show of spectacles in his plays; or, if he did not employ spectacles, he would seem bound to assuage the disappointment of his audience with an apologetic prologue. The fact that none of Seneca's nine surviving plays employs the device of a tragic spectacle or the plea for a fair and peaceful hearing, either in the form of a prologue, epilogue, or a speech during the course of the action, lends eloquent support to the current theory that Seneca's plays were written only for declamation or for court presentation. As he was an intimate member of the court for many years, he could easily and logically have written for this audience. The tone of his plays indi-

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cates that his hearers were select, noble, and educated, and a group either sympathetic or so small that the behavior of a few individuals could not destroy the effect of tragedy.

Seneca's characteristic beginning is an extremely long soliloquy, usually delivered, and this is an important distinction, by the main character, who combines exposition with classical allusion and resounding rhetoric. The beginning of *Hercules Furens*, a hundred and thirty lines delivered by the goddess Juno, differs slightly from the general rule in that Juno stands apart from the action and never returns to the play. This is true also of the ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon*. These two openings are distinctly separated from the main body of the play.

In the tragedy of *Thyestes* the opening scene departs from the prologue form and is given as a dialogue between the fury, Megaera, and the tortured ghost of Tantalus. The ghost's piteous plea not to be a party to new crimes, his fear and agony, heighten the effect of gloom and terror which is appropriate as a setting for this tragedy. The opening scene of several Elizabethan plays, notably *The Spanish Tragedy*, bears a resemblance to this intense colloquy. Indeed, the spirit of Megaera as the embodiment of revenge, and the character of the ghost as a fury's tool, become Elizabethan commonplaces.

It seems strange that Seneca, a literary dramatist, should have had more influence over Elizabethan tragedy than the Greek tragedians who had weathered the rigors of production. The explanation is doubtless the fact that Seneca's tragedies were the first to be made available in English translation, and that for a considerable time the Elizabethan's knowledge of Greek tragedy was derived through Seneca.

### *Exposition in Early English Plays*

There is a marked difference in the conventional beginnings of classic plays and early English moralities and interludes, terms which seemed to be bestowed interchangeably with characteristic

Elizabethan nonchalance. One at once notes that the relationship of audience and playwright has changed radically. The influence of the Christian Church over the drama has, momentarily at least, curbed the spectators' animal spirits, and given the author the loftiness of the Word of God. Playwrights are not found humbly pleading for a gentle hearing, they are preachers convinced of their right to deliver a sermon. Most of the moralities and interludes open with a prologue. It is frequently so designated and set apart from the rest of the play, though in other cases its separateness from the following action is only apparent through the text.

The form is usually this: the character who is to deliver the prologue enters and introduces himself. He is not infrequently the classic "Prologus" or the equally familiar classic figure of "The Messenger." In rhymed couplets (the characteristic versification of the entire play) he gives the "Argument," which is usually the struggle of good against evil. Prologus stresses the moral, threatens the hearers with hell-fire, and concludes with the precept that in Christ alone lies hope for salvation. The play customarily begins with the merriest scene in its compass, one showing the hero lustily and blithely sinning. The progress is downward through the abysses of evil and despair to a terminal point of repentance and retribution.

Some of the early Elizabethan plays begin with a soliloquy; in *The World and the Child* (1500-1528), Mundus enters and introduces himself, setting the scene and preparing for the action. The Palmer performs the same service in John Heywood's *The Four PP* (1520-1522); and Thersites performs it in the play which bears his name. In the early love drama *Calisto and Melibaea* (1526-1529), Melibaea enters and at once admits to the audience that she is "cumbered by dotage of one Calisto." She philosophizes upon love, bestowing credits where they are due to Petrarch, Heraclitus, and the Scriptures. In the end she vows that she will defy the worldly love with which she is afflicted.

Several of the comedies almost contemporary with the 1600-1605 period begin without prologues. *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1592) opens directly with scene one, in which King Edgar of

England, surrounded by members of his court, laments the evils rampant in his realm and laments the knaves who fill it. At this opportune moment a character named Honesty enters and, claiming that he has a *knack* to know knaves, is given royal permission to seek them throughout the kingdom. *Look About You* (1598-1600) also opens directly on the scene of Robin Hood's visit to the hermit, which disguised character happens to be Skink, the Vice. The historical *Life and Death of Jack Straw* (1590-1593) opens briskly with the dramatic scene in which Jack refuses to pay the King's tax on his daughter, claiming that she is not yet fourteen years old. The Collector refuses to take his word for this and "offers to strike him." Enraged, Jack "throws him on the ground" with such apparent force that, uttering a cry for help, the King's officer dies.

Despite these exceptions of plays which launch at once into the action, early Elizabethan comedies are much more apt to have prologues than not, and the statement can be even more emphatically made in regard to tragedies which were an extremely popular dramatic form in the fifties. In tragedy probably because the action is more complicated than in comedy, the chief function of the prologue is apt to remain expository, as in *Cambyses* (1558-1570) and *Tancred and Gismunda* (1591). The latter play is particularly interesting in that it survives not only in quarto but in two variant manuscripts. In both of these the "Argument," which is in the form of a prose description, precedes the action, while in the quarto there is a briefer, more polished "Argument" in blank verse. This is unlike the prose versions in that it leaves one or two facts about the plot to the imagination. Following the "Argument" are descriptions of the "Introductios" or dumb shows which, accompanied by music, come between the acts. The first scene of Act I continues the exposition by having "Cupid come out of the heavens in a cradle of flowers" to deliver a long soliloquy.

The separate prologue scene is a popular device in many of the tragedies; it is found for instance in *The Spanish Tragedy* (1584-1589), *Soliman and Perseda* (1589-1592), and *The Misfortunes*

of *Arthur* (1588). In the first, the Ghost of Andrea enters with the symbolic character of Revenge, to whom he proceeds to tell in gruesome detail how he was murdered by Don Balthazar. The Ghost requests Revenge to assist him in his plans of retribution, and Revenge promises his aid. As in several other plays, when these two prologue characters have concluded the business of exposition, they determine to "here sit down to see the mystery and serve as Chorus in this Tragedy." They comment upon what has taken place at the conclusion of every act. Each time the Ghost pleads with Revenge to further exert himself; at the end, Don Andrea's shade, completely satisfied, offers his thanks.

*Soliman and Perseda* opens with a prologue scene similar enough in construction to the past illustration to supply one of the strong arguments for Kyd's authorship of the play. Love, Fortune, and Death enter and argue their respective rights to be a chorus for the tragedy, and, since none will cede his place, all stay. Following every act they continue the dispute, until in the end, Love and Fortune give way to Death, who concludes with the pretty compliment that "he spares none but sacred Cynthia's friend." In the comedy of *Mucedorus* (1588-1598) Comedy and Envy indulge in a similar prologue argument, and though they do not serve as a chorus to the play they appear in the end, when Comedy pays Queen Elizabeth a similarly gracious compliment by saying that "Envy has had to yield to a Woman though not to me."

Two facts stand out clearly in any study of Elizabethan prologues. The first is the decided vogue of the form. Authors liked prologues. They played with them, experimented with them, and explored their possibilities, creating, even in early plays, amusing and extraneous episodes like that of the curiosity raiser in *The Three Ladies of London* (1581) and the allegorical portrait of London in that play's sequel.

The second obvious fact about prologues is that they soon became preeminently the "author's toy" and that as such they came more and more to be devoted to his personal defense. It would appear that once the playwright abandoned the sanctuary of the

Church, his fate resting solely in the hands of his audience, he found it expedient to employ a prologue to crave its favor.

In many plays like *Damon and Pithias* (1565) and *The Trial of Treasure* (1567), Prologus approaches the audience, saying that though the style be barbarous, not fined with eloquence, yet the author desires his hearers' gentle acceptance, as do the players in all humility.

This lowly approach is the safest and that is doubtless the reason why it is the most usual, though a facetious prologue may please if it is sufficiently witty. In Thomas Nash's allegorical *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592-1593), he employs Will Summer, the celebrated fool of Henry VIII, as prologue. In good time, after some excellent fooling, Will takes up the matter of "the Prologue." He says, "So it is, boni viri, that one fool presents another, and I, a fool by nature and by art do speak to you in the person of the idiot our playmaker. He, like a fop and an ass, must be making himself a public laughing-stock and have no thanks for his labor. . . . I'll show you what a scurvy Prologue he has made me in an old vein of similitudes; if you be good fellows give it the hearing that you may judge of him thereafter." With this, Will launches into the prologue, which concludes with "I care not what you say now, for I play no more than you hear, and some of that you heard too (by your leave) was extempore. He were as good have let me had the best part for I'll be revenged on him to the uttermost, in this person of Will Summer. . . . I'll sit as a Chorus and flout the actors and him at the end of every scene."

This facetious defense is a clever one, for all and more is said by the fool than would be hazarded by the critic, whose venom is thus stolen before the play begins. This type of defense illustrates the truism that by leading the assault upon himself, one has a chance of directing its course.

Ben Jonson was shrewd enough to appreciate the possibilities of this approach and he tried an amusing variation of it in the Induction to *The Poetaster* (1601), where the character of Envy "arises in the midst of the stage" and with wild words condemns

“this hated play.” But Jonson, as one might guess, wished no ambiguity in the interpretation of this remark and he hastened to bring on an armed Prologue to bid the monster stay. There follows the familiar arraignment of Envy and the castigation of those “base detractors and illiterate apes that fill up rooms in fair and formal shapes.” The rallying of these noisy defendants to the author’s side wholly negates any previous effort to soften the hearts of sporting Englishmen by more subtle means.

Jonson, proud, uncompromising and brilliant, lacked so many qualities instinctive to a playwright that one wonders why he chose to write for the stage. The dramatic form was probably not his first choice nor his most congenial medium, but the edict of 1599 which banned the publication of straight prose or verse satire left him no option. In his first satirical comedy *Every Man in His Humor* (1598) the “Prologue” is made to proclaim that the author:

For want hath not so loved the stage  
As he dares serve the ill customs of the age  
Or purchase your delight at such a rate  
As for it he himself must justly hate.

Surely a lofty and condescending way to speak to an audience. In *Every Man out of His Humor* (1599) Jonson brilliantly and lengthily continues his assault upon the public and the times with both a prologue scene and a “Prologue.”

When one scans Jonson’s comedies chronologically it becomes apparent that the prologues written in the period 1600-1605 are not only the most vituperative but also the most original and the most interesting. After each bout with the audience he seems to have retired to sharpen his words and strengthen his blows. There is every indication that Jonson’s satirical comedies were eagerly awaited, eagerly seen and eagerly torn to bits. This negative popularity however was cold comfort to a vain man of great ability, and there is proof in his prologues beginning with *Volpone* (produced in 1605), that he had finally and grudgingly surrendered to many of the “ill customs of the age.” He then and there attempted to

drop the role of a militant crusader for that of a more conventional playwright primarily eager for applause. In the new role he began to write prologues that were more like other men's, and much less stimulating. The story of Jonson's relations with his public as reflected in his "Prologues" and "Epilogues" is treated at more length in Chapter VI.

### *Plays of the Period with Prologues*

Of all the authors producing comedies between 1600-1605, Jonson and Marston obviously have the hardest time beginning, take the longest time at it, and are apt to give the least exposition. They seem to be, like many satirists of other ages, good critics, good talkers, and poor plotters. As if to ease the dreaded plunge into action they warm up with talk, first a "Prologue," with perhaps an "Induction" preceding it, and in the quarto sometimes a "Preface" preceding the "Induction," to take care of "the Reader." Both authors are characterized by the eagerness with which they grapple their hearers and the reluctance with which they let them go. Not one of their plays within the chosen period is without at least one preliminary salutation, and in each case the purpose of the address is self-defense. Usually some concession is made to classic exposition; Jonson often states the time and sets the place, but this information is conveyed in a flash and is of decidedly secondary importance. It could easily be given in a line or two of speech.

“Inductions” and “Prologues” are terms used interchangeably by other authors who are satisfied with a single introduction, but Jonson and Marston, eager for more opportunity to address their audiences, distinguish between them and make use of the interval between the second and third “sounding” for their first talk which they call “the Induction.” They reserve the time after “the third sounding” for the conventional “Prologue.” Both these preludes to the action are found to be atmospheric and ingenious, and they contain many of the author's most famous lines.

The “Induction” often takes the form of an independent scene

laid in the theatre just before the play begins, like the "Inductions" of the Robin Hood plays. That in *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington* (1598) is artfully extempore and disorganized. Sir John Eltham is directed to enter in a green suit "to play the part of Little John." He calls for the other players and they "run out at every door" shouting casual greetings as they adjust their costumes. Skelton, who plays the part of Friar Tuck, says that he will act as commentator, and he calls forth the dumb show which is so complicated that his services are sorely needed. In the sequel play, *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington* (1598), Skelton again comes on the stage "without his gown and hood" and says that the action begins where it left off; this he reviews briefly, then puts on the costume of Friar Tuck and departs.

Many introductory scenes which are termed "Prologues" begin in the same way. In *Wily Beguiled* (1596-1606), for instance, "Prologus" enters and calls for the title of the play which is to be shown. A Player appears with a placard bearing the name *Spectrum* which causes Prologus to protest "What, again!" and the Player goes off stage to inquire. During his absence a Juggler comes on and entertains the audience for a few moments and then the Player reappears, takes down the sign and puts *Wily Beguiled* in its place. Prologus indicates his pleasure in this choice and, promising the audience that they will be merrily entertained, he departs.

The prologue of the second Parnassus play treats a delicate subject. Prologus wishes to come in, but is refused entrance by the Stage-keeper because of the rudeness of the carping audience. In the third Parnassus play the character of a Stage-keeper appears again, assisted by a Boy and Momus and Defensor. This time he follows the safer policy of ignoring the audience's ill behavior, of flattering it instead in his plea for a gracious acceptance of the play.

In *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1600) the purpose of the "Induction" is to convey a particular message to the audience. The Tire-man enters, followed by one of the children of Paul's, and they discuss the hardships under which the company has labored during production. This scene would appear to substantiate the

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contention that the play was written in part only by Marston, after difficulties had arisen in the theatre. The Tire-man protests that he "who composed the book" has done them a vehement wrong "by snatching it away." However, the Tire-man promises, trying the while to beat back the boys from the entrance, that if the audience will bear with him he will do the best he can in presenting the play, which perhaps means the improvised version by Marston, the play-doctor who was called in. *Jack Drum's Entertainment* gives every indication of being a patched-up thing, and its chief charm rests in the delightful songs which are given in their entirety in the text.

The character of a Tire-man appears again in the five-page "Induction" of Marston's *What You Will* (1601), where, with gallants, classically named, the defense of the author is argued. In the prologue which follows, much of the same material is repeated by Philomuse who "endeavors to endear" the audience's thoughts to the "composer's spirit."

In the "Induction" of *The Malcontent* (1604) the Tire-man appears again, and there is enacted an interesting scene of contemporary playhouse behavior. W. Sly, bearing a stool, presents himself upon the stage with his "Cousin Sinklow," and there they sit, loudly ready to see the play. "D. Burbidge, H. Condell and I. Levin" appear and argue with the gentlemen, begging them to retire from the stage so that the play may proceed. After discussing the performance, the fact is mentioned that the play is like a drama which is in the possession of another company. "So is Jeronimo!" it is exclaimed. "One for another!" is the answer. The boisterous gallants are, with difficulty, prevailed upon to withdraw to a private room where they are assured that they will be more comfortable and that they will enjoy themselves far more than they would at the performance itself.

Jonson in his "Induction" to *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) brings on three children of the Chapel, who proceed to squabble over the possession of "the cloak" which is the conventional costume-symbol worn by the speaker of the prologue. They finally agree to draw lots. The First Boy wins and wishes ardently to speak the prologue

but the Third Boy, a loquacious wag, insists upon stealing his thunder and telling “all the argument of the play.” He gives the title and the setting, and says that there will be Mercury and Cupid “as that’s a thing to be noted, take any play-book without a Cupid or a Mercury in it and burn it for a heretic in poetry.” The Third Boy then proceeds to outline more plot than is in the piece, though he is constantly being interrupted by poor Number One Boy who fights for his rights and struggles to gain attention by mimicking certain members of the audience, the sober gallant, the tobacco smoker, and so on. It is during this business that the famous remark comes that “your poets seem to be promoters of other men’s jests,” with nothing of their own “but what they have twice or thrice cooked” and that the “ghosts of some three or four plays, departed a dozen years hence have been seen walking on your stage here.” At this point the Second Boy who has long been silent promises that today’s poet differs greatly from all the others, that he is “untouched with any breath of this disease.” Both the other Boys are so amazed by this announcement that they are struck mute and the Second Boy speaks the prologue in peace after the third sounding. The gist of the prologue is the customary speech of Jonson’s early plays, that “our doubtful author” is “loath to prostitute [the] virgin strain [of his labors] to every vulgar and adulterate brain.” He does not seek “the foamy praise that drops from common jaws,” but rather, he weaves a garland with the help of those “who can both censure, understand, and define what merit is.”

In contrast to Jonson’s great dependence upon the prologue, one notes that Shakespeare seldom used the form. Of his histories only *Henry IV, II* (produced 1597–1598) has an “Induction” and *Henry V* (1599) has a “Prologue.” Both give some exposition and express the hope that the piece will find favor. Of the so-termed tragedies according to the First Folio, *Pericles* (1608) has a “Prologue” in which Gower gives the drift of the strange and incestuous story which is about to be enacted; and the strangely classified *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–1603) has the famous “Armed Prologue” whose title and whose words suggest some relationship to

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Jonson's *Poetaster* and the war between the theatres. *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594-1598, an adaptation of an earlier play by the same name performed between 1588-1593) is the only comedy of Shakespeare to have an independent prologue scene. In this, the drunken Christopher Sly is evicted from an ordinary, falls asleep and is discovered by a lord in an antic mood. The lord thinks it sport to dress the beggar in rich raiment which will confound him when he wakes. He elaborates upon the idea by having him greeted by a "loving wife" and entertained by a pleasant comedy, that of *Katherine and Petruchio*. Thus, *The Taming of the Shrew* is presented to the bewildered Master Sly as a play within a play. No mention of Master Sly's fate is made upon its termination.

The fact that Shakespeare does not often make use of a prologue is proof that he rarely felt the need for one, either as an aid for exposition or as a means of personal defense. He seems cognizant of the fact that extraneous material, no matter how witty, vitiates the suspense of a scene, and he appears to be as eager to plunge into the action of the play as Jonson is eager to hold back.

Despite the fact that Jonson and Marston and their fellow satirists often gave their prologues the bite of censure, most other authors continued to employ the form with conventional humility. Heywood's "Prologue" to *The Four Prentices of London* (1592-1600) is in the familiar form of an apology, a most thoroughgoing apology, delivered by "three" who "enter in black cloaks at three doors." The First Prologue says that he comes to excuse "the author who made the play," the Second "the name of the play," and the Third "the errors of the play":

*Second Prologue:* Our authority is a manuscript, a book writ in parchment not being public . . . but had not ye yet rather for novelty's sake see Jerusalem ye never saw than London ye see hourly?

*Third Prologue:* We acknowledge none for the errors we could find, we would willingly amend but if those clear-sighted gentlemen . . . would rather look over them than through them. . . .

*First Prologue:* Were we three thousand [Prologues] we think ourselves too few.

Another conventional use of the prologue is as a dedication of the play, like the charming sonnet addressed to an unknown patron in *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (1599-1600):

To the boundless ocean of your worth  
This little drop of water we present.

The expository type of prologue remains a familiar form, as in Fulke Greville's *Alaham* (1598-1600) and other plays which need considerable initial explanation. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1599-1604) has both a prologue and a prologue scene to set the stage for action. The same is true of *Grim the Collier* (1600); here the prologue is delivered by Saint Dunstan who "shows himself again upon the earth." He outlines the story and then "sleeps" on the ground as the prologue scene begins. This is the judgment of Malbecco's ghost by Pluto and the court of devils, which action is returned to in the last scene of the play when Malbecco's ghost is brought back to receive a final verdict. This last scene satisfies the demand of dramatic unity, and a similar termination would do much for the poor devil of Edmonton whose personal problems remain unsolved at the end of that drama.

Plays by 1600, unless they treat unusual subjects, have no need for the expository prologue. This function had in great measure disappeared because of the general defiance of the unity of time and the fashion of a more sophisticated dramatic technique which concentrated upon action rather than upon narration. If the form was retained, it was an ornament or as a vindication of the author's right to speak a few words of his own to the audience.

### *Plays of the Period without Prologues*

#### PANTOMIME

More and more, late Elizabethan plays open with pantomime or soliloquy or dialogue. The pantomime or dumb show is a mark of early construction, an excellent example of which is found in *Gorboduc* (1562). A few of the plays within the 1600-1605 period

retain this type of opening. One is *The Thracian Wonder* (1590–1600), which begins by showing Pheander, the King of Thrace, striding on to the stage with his sword drawn. Two noblemen struggle to hold him back as his daughter Ariadne flees across the stage with an infant in her arms. The scene which follows this pantomime takes place several decades later.

A considerably more involved dumb show begins *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (1599–1600): “A dombe showe. After an Alarum, enter one way the Duke of Burgundie, an other way, the Duke of Anjou with his power, they encounter, Burgundie is slaine. Then enter the Dutches of Burgundie with young Fredericke in her hand, who being pursued of the French, leaps into a River, leaving the child upon the banke, who is presently found by the Duke of Brabant, who came to aid Burgundie, when it was too late.” This action is difficult to follow and the author apparently realized it, because a prologuist enters immediately after the pantomime to explain in detail what has happened.

*Jeronimo I* (1600–1605) commences with a dumb show which differs from the previous two in that there is no perceptible time lapse between it and the first scene. It is effective and easily comprehensible since it serves mainly as an atmospheric setting, showing the ceremony in which Jeronimo is created Marshal of Spain.

Though a pantomime beginning is visually effective, it presents difficulties as a conveyance of exposition. The realization of this deficiency was perhaps responsible for the popularity of the opening which combined a background of pantomime with dialogue. A procession or crowd marches on and one or more characters address the group: the lords and their soldiers in *The Blind Beggar* (1600); the Marquis and his huntsmen in *Patient Grissell* (1600); the King and his train in *The Noble Soldier* (1602–1623); the Duke and his revelers in *Blurt Master Constable* (1601–1602); Shallow and the complainers against Falstaff in *The Merry Wives* (1598–1602).

To illustrate the device in more detail, take Heywood’s *The Royal King* (1602–1618). The monarch and his lords march on

stage, in triumphant return from the wars. As the King converses with his loyal Marshal, heaping lavish praise upon him, two lords, Clinton and Chester, are stirred to jealousy and vow to destroy the upstart favorite.

In *The Honest Whore* (1604) the same device is used effectively by showing the funeral procession of Infelice and by giving to the mourners speeches which reveal the necessary exposition. (Heywood's *Woman Killed with Kindness* begins ingeniously with a different kind of spectacle, the celebration of a wedding party. The remarks made by the guests reveal both the drift of the action and the mood in which it is to be interpreted.)

The beginning, with the marching on of a procession or a crowd was effective and well suited to the Elizabethan stage. It was a device used by Shakespeare in his tragedies of *Coriolanus* (1598-1613), *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *Timon of Athens* (1606-1608) and *Julius Caesar* (1598-1599); and it was employed in all his history plays with the exception of *Henry IV, II* (1597-1598), *Henry V* (1599), and *Richard III* (1592-1597).

The objection to this device, as has been pointed out earlier, is that it is hard to convey the facts of exposition against the confusion of a group background. There is also considerable chance, unless the handling is masterly, that the clarifying scene which is required to follow will be anticlimactic.

#### SOLILOQUY

The easiest and least dramatic way for a play's action to begin is to incorporate the figure of the prologue into the first scene and to begin with a soliloquy after the manner of Roman comedy and the mummer plays and some of the early English comedies previously described. In the period 1600-1605, Day's *Law Tricks* is one of the few plays which begins in this manner. Horatio, the villain, enters and indulges in immediate self-revelation, baring his dark heart and his infamous designs upon his neighbor's wife.

One might think that the soliloquy opening would be used freely in tragedy, for it bore the stamp of both Euripides' and Seneca's ap-

proval, but, except in plays of conscious imitation like Kyd's translation of Garnier's *Cornelia* (published in 1594) and the *Misfortunes of Arthur* (produced in 1588), it is not common. Even so firm a classicist as Ben Jonson saw fit to open his tragedy of *Sejanus* (1603) with a group entrance. Sabinus could have easily delivered his protracted rant upon the rottenness of Rome, "solus," though it would have been a duller opening without the reactions of the Roman citizens standing beside him.

The tragedy of *Hoffman* (1602-1603) begins with a soliloquy. It is not delivered by the ghost of Hoffman's father as might be expected, but by Hoffman himself. He gives twenty-seven lines of vivid description concerning his father's murder and his plans to avenge it. According to the stage directions, this speech is illuminated by flashes of lightning and punctuated by rolls of thunder.

One might expect to find a soliloquy beginning for the play of revenge which influenced *Hoffman*. But *Hamlet* begins, not with an omniscient speech by the ghost, nor one by Hamlet, but with the infinitely more effective scene "upon the platform," "before the break of day." During the course of the action, the audience learns as Horatio does, that, nightly, a ghost has been seen to walk, much resembling the dead King. Suddenly, as Horatio and Marcellus talk, and as the audience is stirred by the contagion of their fear, the ghost appears.

It is interesting to note that, with one exception, Shakespeare never began a play with a soliloquy, though the exception is so famous (*Richard III*) that one might think it a more usual device with him. Apart from several plays which open with group entrances or processions, all begin with dialogue between two or three characters.

#### DIALOGUE

By 1600, Elizabethans favored a dialogue opening, and one finds many of these beginnings both in the form of stylized speech or of natural conversation. The forced talk between the two gallants, Challener and Vallenger in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*

(1603-1604) is unreal as conversation though it is necessary as exposition, revealing that it is Sir Godfrey's birthday and that Challenier desires to attend the celebration in order to see this knight's fair daughter Anabel, with whom he is deeply in love. When Valenger shows scant interest and says, with melancholy, that he is "an enemy to woman," it is the timeless clue that this misanthrope will soon make off with his best friend's lady.

In contrast to these stiff and unnatural speeches is the realistic dialogue of the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1602-1607). They speak in short, tense lines as they stand outside the sickroom of young King Edward. As they talk, quickly and furtively, they are not able to conceal their eagerness for the King's death, which will give them an opportunity to place their own children, Lady Jane and Lord Dudley, on the throne.

*The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (1604) has an opening which is a realistic commentary on the London scene. Some gallants enter "newly from play." Among them is Young Chartley, the hero, who has lost heavily and is in an argumentative mood. He insists upon borrowing money to continue the game. The dice are cast and Young Chartley wins momentarily from Haringfield and Sencer, but the losers are quick to break up the game by suggesting the better sport of courting Gratiana in Gracious Street.

*Sir Giles Goosecap* (1601-1603) begins with natural and amusing conversation between the pages of the ladies and those of the knights. Bullaker volunteers descriptions of the courting knights and then turns to the ladies' pages: "Good wags, let me win you now for the geographical parts of your ladies in requittal." To this, witty Will replies: "That you shall, sir, and the hydrographical too and you will." The accounts of the masters and the mistresses are exchanged in a manner which leaves no doubt that the theme of the play is a love-chase. When the gossip and the exposition has been given, the pages depart from the stage quickly, as is customary —to sup or drink, it is usually said.

Expository chambermaids, those darlings of the nineteenth cen-

tury, appear in *Satiromastix* (1601). As they sweep the bedroom and strew flowers about it, they reveal that they are making preparations for the reception of a bride and groom.

One finds chamber talk again in the first scene of *The Malcontent* (1604), an unusual scene in that it consists of only eight lines, used to give the "smell" of the play. It will be remembered that the opening scene has been preceded by a two-and-a-half-page preface to the reader and a five-page Induction. Then, these directions are given: "The vilest out of tune music." Enter Bilio, the choleric marshal, and Prepasso, the gentleman usher. They complain of the stench of the room and perfume it, saying that the Duke is coming and that is all there is of scene one.

### *Beginnings in Medias Res*

In any consideration of exposition it is important to note whether a play starts at the beginning of a story or in *Medias Res*. A play is said to begin in *Medias Res* when, prior to the first scene, some important action has taken place that involves any character or characters who appear on the stage later during the course of the action.

The beginning in the middle or even toward the end is a characteristic of classic plays, quite obviously because of the restrictions of the unity of time. This same limitation logically effected tragedy more than comedy. The Elizabethans, however, had a healthy disregard of the "Classic Rules," and in both genres their natural inclination was to begin at the beginning. Even Ben Jonson defended a free handling of "the laws of Comedy" in his Induction to *Every Man Out*. In this play a character asks if a contemporary playwright should not be bound to "the equal division into acts and scenes according to the Terentian manner, his true number of actors, the furnishing of the scene with Grex or Chorus and that the whole argument fall within the compass of a day's business?" Cordatus, "the Author's friend" gives him this answer: "Oh no,

these are too nice observations . . . if those laws you speak of had been delivered us, ab initio, and in their present virtue and perfection" it would be so, but their history has been one of constant alteration throughout the years, so "I see not then, but we should enjoy the same license, or free power, to illustrate and heighten our invention as they did, and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few (who are nothing but form) would thrust upon us."

Though most of the plays produced between 1600 and 1605 begin at the beginning, there are some which should be noted as opening in *Medias Res*, after important action has taken place: Viola and Sebastian have been shipwrecked before the first scene of *Twelfth Night*; the King has tired of his wife in *The Noble Soldier*; the Duke has determined to murder Eurydice in *The Maid's Metamorphosis*; Hamlet's father has been murdered and his ghost has been seen walking upon the parapet; Valerio has secretly married Gratiana in *All Fools*; Maria has been compromised by Gerardine in *The Family of Love*, and Juliet by Claudio in *Measure for Measure*, and the first Lucy by young Chartley in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*; Othello has wed Desdemona; Infelice has supposedly died in *The Honest Whore* and the Malcontent has been banished from the dukedom of Genoa.

#### PRECIPITATION OF INITIAL ACTION

There is always some spark which ignites a play, whether the action begins at the beginning or in *Medias Res*. In *Sir Thomas Wyatt and Lust's Dominion* it is the death of the King, while in *All's Well*, it is the supposedly fatal illness of the King of France which sends Bertram, and later Helena, to the French court. War is a popular motivating force; in *The Four Prentices* the action begins with the Prentices' decision to join the Crusade. *The Blind Beggar* begins with the cessation of hostilities in France and a report of the outbreak of civil war in England; *The Alarum for London*, by the betrayal of the city of Antwerp and the beginning

of the siege. The determination upon a truce starts the complications in *The Trial of Chivalry*, and the cessation of war instigates *Blurt Master Constable* and *The Royal King*.

An event which frequently sets a play in motion is a decision to start out on a journey, as in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, when the King of France suddenly reveals that he is going to make a pilgrimage to Palestine. In both *Phoenix* and *Measure for Measure*, the Duke and son of a Duke, respectively, decide to take a trip, ostensibly afar, but in reality within the realm. In *What You Will* and *Monsieur d'Olive* it is the return of a character which creates the necessary complications to provoke the action.

Sometimes the appointed day is one upon which a character is committed to undertake a bargain, or wed a young lady, or settle an account with the Devil. Or he may simply meet another character whose appearance spurs him into action. There are several plays in which the decision is arbitrary. For no particular reason "today" is chosen for a bout of wits or love. This lack of specific motivation for initial action is a characteristic associated with comedy rather than tragedy.

In both these genres, the opening scene is of the utmost importance to the balance and to the pattern of the play as a whole. In a tragedy, the opening scene conventionally shows the hero, either low and about to rise, and thus complete a full circle ending in his therapeutic purge, as in *Thomas Lord Cromwell* or *Bussy d'Ambois*; or the opening scene presents the hero as powerful, in happy circumstances, just this side of his zenith, after reaching which, his career will describe an arc downward, as in *Sejanus* and *Othello*. No matter how darkly a tragedy may begin, its end, according to its definition, will be darker.

Comedies on the other hand, are built on a line that falls but rises with such resiliency that there is no noticeable change in the end, either in the social condition of the main character or in his state of happiness. The most frequent change is the gay addition or recapture of a wife or husband, as the case may be.

*Advice to the Elizabethan Playwright*

An Elizabethan playwright should be advised that he has considerable freedom in the matter of exposition. For instance, if he has undertaken a complicated plot which needs explanation prior to the opening scene, he should feel free to employ an expository prologue. He should feel equally free, if he wishes to avail himself of a prologue not for plot purposes but simply because he wants to have a few words of his own with the audience. A well-intentioned warning should however be given in this last instance, that he watch his manners, for whether he relishes the thought or not, the fact remains (and always will) that a playwright is at the mercy of his audience, and though he need not fawn upon his spectators he must at least be pleasant if he wishes to succeed in his profession.

If there appears to be no need for a prologue, an author should feel no hesitancy in beginning without one. In fact, he should note that a majority of the plays of the moment are written without them, the exposition being set forth in a number of different ways. He may choose a preliminary dumb show, or if he finds this type of pantomime old-fashioned and cumbersome, he may profit by studying the manner in which other authors adapt pantomime to serve as atmosphere and background for initial dialogue.

He may choose soliloquy, a popular device in the classic theatre and in early English drama and still acceptable as an easy and efficient way of dispatching exposition, though, like the dumb show beginning, it is somewhat old-fashioned.

The new convention is, of course, the dialogue beginning, and in this form the latest trend is away from artificial discourse and toward natural conversation.

In whatever way the Elizabethan playwright decides to begin, he should not be released from his counselor's grasp without a final warning, a universal warning to all playwrights, of the *importance* of a play's beginning. The first moments are golden ones for the author, because the audience freely and eagerly gives him its attention. In the first few minutes he has the rare opportunity of

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establishing any premise he desires, for the acceptance by the audience of an original premise is one of the unwritten laws of the theatre. After the author has stated this premise, however, he is honor-bound to show that all subsequent action follows logically. He must be consistent. He must not make false promises of action which will not occur, or the audience will be justified in feeling cheated. He must be wary of extraneous matter and of self-intrusion. Above all, he must not make the exposition too complicated nor too long. He must quickly launch into "the middle," the action, the heart of the play.





## CHAPTER V

# Middle

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### *Conventional Stage Business*

#### **EATING AND DRINKING**

**V**HEN the theme has been chosen, the characters assembled, and the exposition given, a wise author realizes that the course of his play's action has been determined. Following the demands of these basic elements he is obligated to show certain conventional action and certain demanded scenes. The only outlets for his originality at this juncture are the interpretation which he chooses to give to the events of the plot and whatever incidental stage business he desires to add to it.

If an Elizabethan playwright has chosen the theme of ambition and has personified this emotion by the conventional upstart hero who yearns for power, he knows that, early in the story, he must show a scene depicting both the hero's strength and ambition. He must then show his hero's irrevocable decision to obtain his objective at all costs. Following this decision, the hero must assume the offensive by taking action according to some conventional means: a strategy of disguise, a trick, a lie, a bribe, possibly an engagement of arms or the violent action of murder. Whether the hero em-

ploys one or more of these devices, the outcome is the same. It precipitates complications which lead inevitably to the major encounter with the antagonist. In this encounter the hero employs, again, either force or trickery. For the moment he appears to be successful, but almost at once, fortune fails him. The strength of his opposition increases. His situation becomes more precarious than at any previous time. The hero makes a final, desperate stand, which provokes the climax and brings forth the denouement.

In the case of Elizabethan comedy, the action, though not so violent, follows as conventional a pattern. If an author has selected the popular theme of prodigality, personified by the riotous husband, his first responsibility is to show his hero making the fatal step by which he falls from virtue. He must then show him becoming progressively debauched by gambling, drinking, lying, stealing, philandering (and any other vices that come to mind), until the climax at the point of final degradation. He should then have the hero's spirit reclaimed by a miracle of divine inspiration or by a remarkable show of Christian virtue, such as the sacrifice of a devoted and faithful wife. At this moment of climax, the prodigal's unhesitating repentance is conventional as well as his reaffirmation of faith and his reunion with his loving wife.

The purpose of this chapter is to indicate the action, the stock scenes which were conventionally employed to meet the demands of the plot pattern; and to discuss as well the other type of action which the author was free to add, action unessential to the intrigue but which facilitated the actors' movement and characterization and enriched the scenes with atmosphere, pathos, and humor. This type of action, which adds immeasurably to the comfort of the actors, to the effect of a performance, and to the enjoyment of the audience, is called stage business and will be discussed first.

It is customary to find a certain number of directions for stage business in a script, and it is the nature of the drama that such suggestions are elaborated upon by the director and the actors during rehearsals of the play. In a printed version, though some of these

directions are not recorded, many have established themselves in the text.

Directions for business are frequently indicated in Elizabethan manuscripts and quartos. The call to dinner or to the tavern is one of the most familiar means (as it remains today) of clearing the stage. It is a simple way to dispatch unwanted characters, either during, or at a scene's conclusion. Act II,<sup>1</sup> of *Sir Giles Goosecap* ends typically, as Eugenia says, "Well, come in my lords and take a bad dinner with me now, and we will all go with you at night to a better supper with Lord and Lady Furnival."

The frequently specified business of eating or of preparing food on the stage lends effective atmosphere. In the second scene of *Patient Grissell* the preparation of a meal supplies not only considerable humor but a lively characterization of the heroine and her father. In scene 10 of the same play, the preparations at Sir Owen's house for the Marquis' feast serves the same purpose. It appears that an argument has taken place between Gwenthyan and Sir Owen and the former, in a rage, invites into the house beggars who are seen consuming all the food and drink just as Sir Owen reenters with the Marquis and his retinue of guests.

Specific and amusing stage directions are given concerning food at the beginning of III, 2, of *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, where the servants are instructed to "clear away food"; while in *Satiromastix*, III, 1, the directions read, "Enter Tucca brushing off crumbs"; and in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* Sir Boniface enters in IV, 4, carrying "a trencher with broken meat." Taber then enters with a "bowl of beer and a napkin" and is followed by Young Chartley "with a napkin as if from dinner." In this particular scene the comedy of the discourse is increased by the difficulties the characters have in talking with their mouths full. In *The Thracian Wonder*, II, 2, elaborate directions are given for a picnic: "enter Clown with a tablecloth and Antimon. Spread it ridiculously on

<sup>1</sup> In the interest of more ready reference, the act and scene divisions observed throughout this chapter are based upon modern texts of the plays rather than upon the first edition quartos.

ground. They all sit down" and eat "dishes of apples, nuts and cheese cakes."

Many of the plays feature the business of a feast or a banquet or a gay carouse as the setting for a scene of action. It may give atmosphere to the opening or background to a scene, or it may be the provocation for the company's marching off the stage at the play's conclusion. Certain banquet scenes have a conventional significance, such as the "love banquet" which is supposed to induce affection. Time and again, to the accompaniment of provocative music and trays of food, a lover presses his suit upon the object of his choice. The antithesis of this scene is also used, the "death banquet," during the course of which poison is secretly poured into the victim's glass.

The habit of drinking is frequently employed as a method of characterization, as in the case of Falstaff and Captain Quintilliano, the leader of "the company of quart pots" in *May Day*. The personality of Madido is fixed by this device, when in *Parnassus I*, Act II, he holds a volume of Horace in one hand and a bottle of Madeira in the other. Applying himself eagerly to both, he becomes so inspired that he finally cries, "Now I am fit to write a book myself!"

The character of Henry VIII is humanized by a drinking bout in scene 6 of *When You See Me*. The action takes place in Newgate Prison where the King, in disguise, has been brought as a disorderly disturber of the peace. He at once gives the Porter a generous sum of money and orders him to bring the inmates forth to drink "for a pair of hours or so." The Porter, astonished by the largesse, quickly complies, and in a moment the prisoners enter and an uproarious celebration begins.

The business which shows one or more characters intoxicated is an effective perennial. The most usual version of this presents one or more men jovially tipsy, as in *The Wit of a Woman*, scene 16. Here, Gero the dilatory vintner's boy, who has promised to deliver wine for a wedding, enters with the braggart Bizard. Though both have already consumed a good portion of the order by "tasting,"

they continue to sample the beverage, indulging, as they do, in merry talk and suggestive lazzi. In *The Gentleman Usher*, III, Chapman presents the variation of female drunkenness which has always been assumed to be entertaining. The blotched but lusty widow Corteza has been made drunk by Pogio, who delightedly exclaims, "Lord, how I have whetted her!" As he speaks she is seen making love to the old Duke, raising her skirts and crying, "Look you, I warrant you I have a leg . . . a great bumbasted leg!" No one finds her antics in any way distasteful. The Duke simply calls, "Now what a merry, harmless dame this is." And the dainty Margaret remarks "this only humor of the cup." In *Sir Giles Goosecap* the character of Lord Furnival's wife is tantalizingly described, and one is led to believe that when she appears she will resemble Corteza. One gossip who has been asked to the feast at Furnival's house eagerly says: ". . . as I hear, he will earnestly invite guests to his home by purpose to make his wife drunk and then dote on her humor most profanely." Unfortunately, Lady Furnival never appears in the play to perform this obligatory business; the author's discussion of it however, and the apparent similarity between this lady and Corteza have served as clues to scholars who were eager to assume that Chapman wrote the play.

A masterly example of drinking used as an integral part of the plot is shown in *Othello*, when Iago plots to make Cassio drunk in order to bring about his fall from favor. After Othello and Desdemona have retired (II, 3) Cassio, who is weary, begs to take his leave, but Iago, sensing his opportunity, insists that Cassio remain and continue to drink. Iago forces Cassio, now growing unsteady, to give admittance to some late revelers. General carousing follows, in which Iago carefully watches Cassio's glass and frequently fills it. When his victim is drunk enough for the purpose, Iago has his tool, Roderigo, start a quarrel. During the scuffle, Montano, a city dignitary who tries to come between them, is wounded, and when Othello enters, awakened by the clamor, he at once accepts Iago's description of the fight and dismisses Cassio as his captain.

Comic satire is added to the business of drinking in *Lingua*, V, 4-18, where an amusing series of incidents show how this vengeful woman makes the "Senses lose their senses" through application to "a bottle of wine." After drinking, *Auditus* enters deaf, *Visus* enters blind and convinced that he is *Polyphemus*, and *Tactus* enters mad and sure he is *Hercules Furens*. *Lingua* laughs till she thinks "her sides will split." In the end, she, like all the others, has to be overcome by *Somnus*, which spirit, according to a convention of the Elizabethan stage, has the power of curing all ills by inducing a brief sleep.

## SMOKING

Smoking is perhaps the second most frequently noted bit of stage business in Elizabethan plays. In the sixteenth century smoking was an affectation, a fashionable and novel habit, and any reference to it testified, in itself, to the character's sophistication. *Castruchio* in *The Honest Whore*, I, 4, spies another gallant's tobacco:

*Castruchio*: Good tobacco, *Fluello*?

*Fluello*: Smell.

*Pioratto*: It may be tickling year for it plays with my nose.

Later in II, 1, *Castruchio* offers the courtezan a smoke, saying, "Here's most Herculean tobacco. Have some acquaintance." To this invitation *Bellafront* contemptuously replies, "Faugh, not! Makes your breath stink. . . ."

In *Lingua*, IV, 4, the personage of "Tobacco" appears as part of *Olfactus'* show of the pleasures of this sense. When he enters the Judge exclaims, "What fiery fellow is that which smokes so much in the mouth?" The directions given for Tobacco's costume and entrance are as follows: "Tobacco enters apparelled in a taffeta mantle, his arms brown and naked, buskins made of the piling of osiers, his neck bare, hung with Indian leaves, his face brown painted with blue stripes; in his nose swines' teeth; on his head a painted wicker crown with two Indian boys naked with tapers in their hands, tobacco boxes and pipes lighted."

Sometimes not only is a person characterized as a smoker but the business of his smoking becomes significant in the plot. In *What You Will*, I, 1, for instance, instead of employing the conventional scene in which the head of the state burns an important contract with a taper, the wild Duke is shown debonairly "lighting his pipe with the petition."

It is interesting to note that in the twentieth century theatre the habit of smoking has lost its ability to characterize. The stage business of smoking seems to have become established as the easiest way for an actor to occupy his hands. The forbearance rather than the practice of smoking now has the power of characterization.

#### GAMES

The business of games and gaming often appears in Elizabethan plays. The casting of dice, for instance, is a picturesque and simple way of characterizing a prodigal, and gambling becomes inevitably associated with any moral story showing a man's progressive demoralization. Wagering, an adjunct of gaming, is illustrated in all degrees from a trifling bet to an impressive wager. An instance of the latter is shown in the last act of *Jeronimo I* where Don Andrea and Balthazar, in final and deathly conflict, wager on their own extinction.

In the less serious matter of "games," chess appears to be the most popular. The opportunities it presented for effective double entendre through the symbolism of its pieces undoubtedly added to its attraction. Card games are sometimes shown as in *May Day* and *Westward Ho!* and one remembers the effective use of this business (in *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, III, 2, where, in the game of noddly, Wendoll asks for Mistress Frankford as his partner. Master Frankford playing with his friend Cramwell watches his wife and Wendoll across the table with anxiety and suspicion. Finally, after their duplicity has been revealed in "terms of the game," Master Frankford complains of a "rheum and migraine," throws down his cards and, apparently exercising the prerogative of an Elizabethan host, sends all the players to bed. Master Frankford and his faithful

servant Nicholas then continue to play the larger game of investigating Mistress Frankford's activities aloft.)

Complicated word games such as "Substantives and Adjectives" and "A Thing Done and Who Did It" are played with the bitter edge of double meaning in *Cynthia's Revels*; while the game of "Rhyming" appears in both *When You See Me* and *Othello*. In the former, Will Summer, the King's fool, proves himself an expert at this witty manner of extempore, playing with Wolsey, the King, the Queen, and Emperor Charles. It is the custom of the game to have the first player give two rhymes which the second tries to parry with two more. Wolsey walks into a trap by choosing, in scene 7:

The bells hang high  
And loud they cry

for Summer at once replies:

None would cry  
If you die

Wolsey angrily retorts:

A rod in school  
A whip for a fool

and Summer bests him with:

A halter, a rope  
For him that would be Pope!

#### SPORTS

The participation in sports is often given as stage business, the most frequently shown of the sports of action being the chase, with its inevitable pun on the hunting of "the hart" and "the heart," "the deer" and "the dear," as in *Patient Grissell*, *Gentleman Usher* and *The Royal King*. A variant of hunting, that of poaching, is familiar business also, as it is shown in *The Merry Wives* and *The Merry Devil*.

Tennis, next to hunting, is mentioned more than any other sport.

It is constantly referred to as a fashionable diversion of gallants. Old Chartley, who, in Act V, scene 1, of *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, is trying to locate his profligate son, is told to inquire "at taverns, ordinaries, bowl-alleys, tennis courts, gaming houses for there we fear he will be found." Ben Jonson in *Cynthia's Revels*, II, 1, effectively uses the image of tennis for Mercury's sarcastic description of the gross Hedon, who "courts the ladies with how many shirts he has sweat at tennis that week, but wisely conceals how many dozen of balls he is in the score."

Tennis players are shown on the stage in *Blurt Master Constable*, II, 1, in which the stage directions read, "Enter Fontinelle from tennis"; while in scene 9 of *When You See Me* the entire action, as has been recorded, revolves about young Prince Edward's historic and truant game of tennis from which he and his opponent, young Dorset, enter late, both "carrying rackets." An actual scene of the gentler game of badminton is shown in IV, 1, of *What You Will*, where two ladies, Celia and Melita, play while their ladies in waiting fetch the birds for them.

#### PRINKING

Though the business of prinking is occasionally assigned to male characters, it is usually written in for the women, testifying perhaps to the conviction of satiric gentlemen that this has always been the favorite pastime of the ladies. There are entertaining illustrations of the device in *Law Tricks*, *Blurt Master Constable*, *Michaelmas Term*, and *The Honest Whore*. In Acts II, scene 1, of the last-named play, the courtezan Bellafront "sits down, carls her hair with her bodkin and colors her lips." Roger, her saucy pander, watches and, when she has finished, mimics her actions. He rubs his cheeks with white and red paint and then looking into the mirror cries, "Zounds! I look worse now than I did before! And it makes my face glister most damnable."

Dr. Eudemus in the famous satiric scene in the tragedy of *Sejanus* (Act II) finds it important to tell Livia, as they brazenly plot her husband's murder, "This change comes timely, Lady, for

your health and restoring of your complexion which Drusus' choler had almost burned up." He concludes with the advice to use the "dentifrice I prescribed to you to clear your teeth and the prepared pomatum to smooth the skin." He further prescribes "physic" and applies a "fucus" to her face.

In *Lingua Tactus* has the inspiration of presenting, as the most persuasive pleaders for his cause of "feeling," "the Queen of Pleasure, Venus, and her son, Cupid, leading a gentleman enamoured," but in despair he admits to the Judge in IV, 6, when his "show" never appears, that:

Thus 'tis five hours ago I sent a dozen maids to attire a boy like a nice gentlewoman, but there is such doing with their looking glasses, pinning, unpinning, setting, unsetting, formings and conformings, painting blue veins and cheeks, such stir with sticks and combs, carcanets, dressings, curls, falles, squares, busks, bodies, scarves, necklaces, carcanets, rebators, borders, tires, fans, palizadors, puffs, ruffs, cuffs, muffs, pustles, fustles, partlets, amulets, annulets, bracelets, and so many lets that you see she is scarce dressed to the girdle and now there's such a calling for fardingales, kertlets, busk-points, shoe ties, etc. that seven peddler shops, nay all Sturbridge fair will scarce furnish her. A ship is sooner rigged than a gentlewoman made ready.

#### LAZZI

Lazzi, or physical horseplay, delighted an Elizabethan audience as it had the audiences of Aristophanes and Plautus and Terence and the *Commedia del'Arte*. Tripping a character, knocking his cap over his eyes, throwing a custard in his face, pouring beer over his suit, beating him, stripping off his clothes, showing him "bare and unbraced" were sure and simple devices with which to raise a laugh—and until man's sense of humor changes basically they will continue to be. On the stage, unless carefully explained to the contrary, any physical eccentricities such as nervous overactivity, slipping, falling, deafness, lisping, stuttering, hiccoughing, sneezing, spitting, and any lack of physical control are accepted as comic.

Even a supposedly humane twentieth century audience finds

amusement in the "good thrummings" given to Falstaff, disguised as the fat woman of Brainford, and in the blows given to the cowardly duelist Sir Andrew. The same audience could likewise be expected to relish the beating of the rascally Robin Goodfellow in *Wily Beguiled*, the dull John Ellis in *Jack Drum*, the braggart Fustigo in *The Honest Whore*, and the bursting Appetitus in *Lingua*. It would also be expected to enjoy the "shaving" of Mulligrub in *The Dutch Courtezan* and the "stripping" of the lout, Tom Strowd, in *The Blind Beggar*, and the "stripping" of the Burgher's Wife in *The Alarum for London*.

The state of undress has always been a reliable source of *lazzi*. In scene 2 of *The Merry Devil* the directions read, "enter Old Clare and Old Jerringham trussing their points as new up," a moment later "enter Blague doing the same." In scene 6 of *Jeronimo I*, for no particular reason, the little Marshal of Spain is described as entering "trussing up his points," while Horatio follows him, pen in hand, taking down a dictation, the burlesque of which seems incongruous in view of the seriousness of the subject to which the letter is devoted. In *Blurt Master Constable*, IV, 3, Lazarillo, the Spaniard, after the humiliation of lying down on his bed and falling through a trap door, suffers the added indignity of being pushed into the street in front of the bawdy house "bareheaded, in his shirt, a pair of pantaloons, a rapier and a tobacco pipe." He vainly begs the little pander Frisco for his clothes, and even as he begs, what he most dreaded comes to pass, the constable and the watch approach. The other senile lover in this play, Curvetto, does not fare much better, for in IV, 1, when he tries to ascend the ladder to the courtezan's room and endeavors to pull up the rope according to the directions given him, he is drenched with the contents of a full chamber pot. This rough physical humor is part of a timeless stage tradition, and the verbal *lazzi* that inevitably accompanies it is based upon the same limited sources of inspiration.

## BUSINESS WITH WORDS

Both bawdy jokes and the glorious and lofty phrases which are typical of the sixteenth century theatre in England are evidence of the Elizabethans' zest for words. There is constant indication of their pleasure in the sound as well as the sight of a play; words are employed with versatility and ingenuity. Idiosyncrasies in a character's delivery and malapropisms are stock speech devices; and the pun, which ranks as a high form of wit, is an Elizabethan obsession. There are many examples of multiple puns, elaborate and long sustained figures of speech. Occasionally, an entire scene is devoted to the enactment of a pun, like the shaving of Mulligrub in *The Dutch Courtezan*, II, 3.

An original and dramatic use of words is found in the popular depiction of foreign languages, foreign accents and provincial dialects, all used as an aid for the delineation of character or as an inducement to laughter. Priests, pedants, doctors, lawyers, students, philosophers, practitioners of black magic and ostentatious boasters are expected to affect the Latin idiom, their choice of words being of a barbarous nature conducive to humor and to puns. Fops and gallants and certain other characters customarily perform their barbarisms with the modern tongues, French, Italian, Spanish, German and Dutch. Amorphus counsels the lout, Asotus, in III, 5, of *Cynthia's Revels*, "Your pedant should provide you some parcels of French or some pretty commodity of Italian to commence with if you would be exotic and exquisite." Laverdure in *What You Will*, in an attempt to follow such counsel, is found assiduously applying himself to "the French jerks" and Captain Foulweather in *Sir Giles Goosecap* indefatigably labors with such brilliant phrases as "allume the torch" and "how I brule for the wench," while honest Barnabe Bunch, the botcher, in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (scene 2) laments that his "honorable humor to learn language and see fashions has lost [him] many a stout draught of strong ale what at London, what at Gravesend where [he] was born." It soon appears that Barnabe has become so addicted to French that when

the Duke of Bullen asks "Wilt thou abide and fight against the approaching enemy?" he is constrained to answer "Ennui? What ennui?"

In several instances the Dutch tongue is used with humorous intent, for example by the sinister character Jacob van Smelt, "the Flemish excrement," who has the following conversation with Barnabe Bunch in scene 4 of the same play:

*Bunch:* Saving your tale, mine host, what is your name?

*Jacob:* Jacob van Smelt.

*Bunch:* Smelt? Lord! many of your name are taken in the Thames.

You're not angry?

*Jacob:* Angry? Niet, niet.

*Bunch:* How? Knit!! Nay then I perceive I shall be angry first.

Zounds! Twit me with my trade!

and so it goes to blows.

Lucy in *The London Prodigal* not only disguises in the costume of a Dutch frau but also tries to speak like one. This double precaution in disguise is not uncommon. The witty Cocledemoy in *The Dutch Courtezan* quickly determines upon the habit of a barber to carry out his plot; he then deliberates for a moment about which tongue will best correspond with this disguise—"Spanish, Dutch or Welsh." The most conspicuous textual indication of Germanic pronunciation is the "d" for "t" and the "w" for "v" though other phonetic clues are usually given.

The Welsh twist seems to be the most laugh-provoking of the "tongues of Britain," though the Devonshire and Yorkshire dialects are certainly not overlooked, wherein the obvious pronunciation of "b" for "p" and "t" for "d" are recorded in the text. The speeches of Sir Vaughan, the Welshman, in *Satiromastix* are given sporadic phonetic attention in the text, and the lines of Sir Owen in *Patient Grissell* are freely interpreted by both the author and the printer. Sir Owen says in scene 4, "Belly the ruddo whee! Wrage witho Mandageny Mon du ac whellock en wea awk." Gwenthyan replies "Sir Owen gramarrye whee: Gwenthyan Mandageny ac

wellock en thawen en ryn mogh." When Sir Owen later defends the Welsh tongue as "finer than the Greek," Farnese, another suitor for Gwenthyan's hand, is unimpressed. He considers "a baked meat's tongue is finer than both."

The use of garbled Latin and garbled foreign words is common, this high-sounding nonsense being constructed upon a firm enough Anglo-Saxon base to interest and amuse the audience. The gay deceivers who set up a mock court in the last scene of *The Family of Love* use a smattering of garbled Latin, while Lingua, pleading her cause before Common Sense employs a more exaggerated kind of fustian. The poem which is delivered in I, 1, of Chapman's *Gentleman Usher* is an illustration of "gallimaufry" which provokes the remark "No inkhorn ever did bring forth the like." It has a prophetic sound of Lewis Carroll.

The red-faced sun hath firkt the flundering shades  
 The last bright amunel on Aurora's brow  
 The busky groves that gag-toothed boars do shrowd  
 With cringle crangle horns do ring aloud.

Marston, who, of all the authors, is the most interested in the dramatic effects of language, employs many word devices but none of them to more effect than the disguise he gives the Malcontent. This character, as has been noted, conceals his identity by speech alone, and the apparent madness of his ranting allows him the freedom of a court fool. His first lines of nonsense are composed, as is customary, almost entirely of English words, but the phrases jumbled so as to make them senseless. The play begins when Malevole sticks his head out of the balcony window and cries: "Yaugh, Godam, what dost thou there? Dukes Ganimed, Junoes, jealous of thy long stockings. Shadow of a woman, what woudst, weasel?"

Shakespeare employs gibberish skillfully in *All's Well*, IV, 1, where Parolles is ambushed, seized, blindfolded and baffled by his captors in the following manner:

*First Lord:* Throca movousus, cargo, cargo, cargo.  
*Interpreter:* Boskos vauvado . . . Kerelybonto.

After several lines of this nature have established the atmosphere of the scene, the Lord, as is usual, employs a sufficient number of English words to convey his meaning to the audience. In *Lingua*, IV, 4, the "puissant god of Tobacco," whose appearance has been the subject of previous attention, gives vent to an outburst of fustian upon his entrance: "Ladoch guenevarroh pufuer shelvaro braggon, Olfia di quanon, ludi Cortilo vraggon . . .," which causes Phantastes to cry "Ha, ha, ha, ha! This in my opinion is the tongue of the Antipodes!" but Memory, acting as an interpreter, says "No, I remember it very well, it was the language the Arcadians spoke that lived long before the Moon."

Stage business involving the written word is frequently employed, the most serviceable form being a letter, used either for the purpose of initial exposition or of subsequent action. Throughout Elizabethan plays letters are delivered with regularity by messengers, pages, maids, and itinerant friends. This sixteenth century mechanism for delivering information at any time it is desired metamorphoses into the equally incredible and indispensable twentieth century device of the telephone. At present the conventional set for a three-act play is rarely without a telephone, which, from time to time, is expected to ring and to reveal to him who answers any fresh intelligence which is necessary to the action. Our casual acceptance of the telephone as an author's agent is tantamount to the Elizabethan's acceptance of the letter. The nonchalance with which an Elizabethan came to regard the convention is illustrated in the last scene of *The Four Prentices of London*, when Robert of Normandy is asked to be King of Jerusalem. He thanks his friends, but excuses himself by saying that he cannot accept because "letters from England tell me William's dead and by succession left the crown to me," startling news to have kept secret.

Over and above its plot function, the letter, like the telephone, serves the purpose of "cover" business or of extraneous entertainment. An instance of the latter is found in the fooling of the Clown, who after the termination of the action in *Parnassus I*, draws a bawdy letter from his pocket and, reading it to the gentlemen be-

fore him, offers to let anyone who wishes copy it down for his own convenience.

The business of reading aloud and of writing aloud are frequently used for the purpose of characterization. Young men like Polymetes and Cromwell who enter "reading from a book" instantly establish themselves as possessing all the attributes of a scholar. Asinius' labored attempts to read a book in *Satiromastix* and Madido's intoxication with Horace are not only humorous incidents but revelations of character. The same is true in Chapman's *All Fools*, IV, 1, where Cornelio shows his complete absorption in the "orthographical" requirements of his divorce decree. He nervously examines the document saying, "is 'egress' and 'regress' in? . . . You have written Sunt with a capital 'S' have you not?" Carefully perusing the spelling and not the sense, the jealous man concludes that "there is no hole to be found."

A popular variation of the stage business with words is the use of "dictation," a form usually carrying plot significance, as in III, 1, of *Gentleman Usher*, where the pompous steward, Bassiolo, takes down a letter from Margaret in reply to one she has received from her lover. It is difficult for the old man to write amid the confusion of those talking about him, he "rubs his temples" and struggles to put words on paper. Everything Margaret says, Bassiolo misconstrues into an opposite meaning, and this, coupled to some words of his own inspiration, succeeds in making the billet doux complete nonsense. In *Sir Giles*, IV, 1, there is an amusing and not unsimilar dictation scene in which Eugenia refuses to answer her suitor Clarence's letter, in fact she refuses to read it, but her uncle, Momford, takes down the words of her protest and scrambles them so that Clarence cannot doubt that Eugenia loves him. Like the characterization of Lady Furnival, this scene is so typical of Chapman that it adds supporting evidence of his authorship.

Sometimes, as in II, 2, of *Bussy d'Ambois*, "reading" has considerable importance in the plot. Tamyra's maid, Pero, is first shown so absorbed in a book that she does not notice the action going on about her. Tamyra calls to her, saying, "Come on Dame, you are

at your book when men are at your mistress." However, when soon thereafter Bussy d'Ambois enters, Tamyra asks Pero to hand her the book, saying, "Go Maid to bed, lend me your book I pray. . . . I'll this night none of your services. Make sure the doors and call your other fellows to their rest." In V, 1, the device of the letter is shown in a melodramatic form when Montsury drags Tamyra on to the stage by the hair and, stabbing her, forces her to write the name of her lover in blood. The device of a letter is also used dramatically in the last scene of *Law Tricks*, where the Countess' "ghost" enters and throws down a paper which is later read and considered sufficient evidence upon which to convict her husband of her death. The letter from the Emperor to Sejanus, in the last act of that tragedy, is remarkable in that it serves as the climax of the play. The missive begins eulogistically and Sejanus swells with confidence, but suddenly its tone changes, it grows strange and vindictive, and ends with a series of accusations and a pronouncement of his doom. Unfortunately, one must report that this ingenious device of a climax by letter is as undramatic as it is Jonsonian.

There is another popular type of word device, "the mock discourse," which is often given a prominent place in the play though it rarely has a close bearing upon the plot. A twentieth century audience would consider this extraneous bombast a curious affectation, but to the Elizabethan an interruption of the sort was not thought strange. There are many illustrations of the long-sustained burst of rhetoric, like Sir Vaughan's railing against baldness in *Satiromastix*, Monsieur d'Olive's dissertations upon tobacco, education, knighthood, and honor, Sejanus' discourse upon the futility of life, the Captain's outcry against poverty in *The Royal King*, Hippolito's defense of honesty in *The Honest Whore*, and Parolles argument against virginity in *All's Well*. One of the most entertaining of these discourses is found in *Blurt Master Constable*, where Lazarillo, the lascivious Spaniard, gives a lecture on "The Love Tricks of Spanish Dames" to the courtezans in the bawdy house, for which event they come prepared with small books to write down his precepts. The longest dissertation is that given by Valerio, who, in the

last scene of *All Fools*, leaps on to a chair and concludes the play with a three-page defense of "horns."

Word business which is of a more functional nature is found in the device of the echo. Here, in the manner of Theocritus' mimes, an echo answers the questioner by repeating his last word or phrase in such a way as to invest it with a new, different, and true meaning. In *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, IV, 1, Echo, in the conventional way, gives the lover good advice in his quest for Eurymine. In the third Parnassus play, II, 2, when Academico asks how he is to make a living in London, his last words and part-words are so chosen as to give him satiric answers, often in the form of puns. The general counsel is that one gets along in London only "by paying." In *Cynthia's Revels* Jonson treats the subject with ingenuity. Here, Mercury calls forth "his charge," the "sorrowful nymph with the percussive voice." When Echo appears he grants her the power of speaking freely. At once, she employs full sentences of her own, in fact, her "babbling tongue" knows no rein, and Mercury has to deprive Echo of her voice in order to be heard himself. By the time Amorphus enters, Echo is again reduced to the familiar repetition of the last word or phrase which she throws back with a double meaning.<sup>2</sup>

In *Law Tricks*, V, 1, a realistic variation of the business is used, in which an unseen character makes echo-like repetitions. The device is effectively employed twice during the tomb scene: first when Horatio comes to the tomb of his Countess and his page echoes him, in the spirit of his guilty conscience; later, when the Countess revives, the page echoes her as a spirit from another world. In *What You Will*, IV, 1, the effect of an echo is again given by a person; this time the true husband, Albano, cries for admittance to his wife's chamber and his protestations are tauntingly repeated by Francesco who is within, masquerading as Albano. (In *The Woman Killed with Kindness* the familiar "aside" variation of the echo scene is shown by having Wendoll's soliloquy upon his love for Mistress Frankford constantly interrupted by Jenkin, the servant, in such

<sup>2</sup> Jonson, *Cynthia's Revels*, Act I, scenes 2 and 3.

a saucy and suggestive way as to create suspense for the revelation of Mistress Frankford's reciprocation of love for Wendoll.)

### *Conventional Stage Action*

#### **LOVE-MAKING**

In turning to the conventional treatment of stock scenes rather than of stage business, the scenes inspired by the powerful emotion of love offer a good point of departure. It should at once be said that such scenes as the one suggested above, the temptation and fall of Mistress Frankford, or Tamyra, or any of the other erring matrons, are rarely shown. If they are shown, they are briefly dispatched according to the custom of the homiletic play, which gives as little sympathy to the sinner and as little attraction to the sin as possible, a method which is disappointing to twentieth century theatre-goers who are trained to dwell upon the psychological poignancy of temptation.

Young and unmarried love is a gayer and easier subject to treat, and in most plays two stock scenes occur: the exchange of vows; and, prior to that, the encounter which is "love at first sight." The latter is a convention which has been accepted by spectators since the beginning of the theatre. When an audience sees two physically attractive young people approach each other, it accepts, without hesitation, their affinity, it longs for the cessation of their trials and hopes for their union, which it is assumed will bring them both everlasting happiness. These are the rights of romantic love. A lover who is physically deficient, either because he is old or unpersonable, is viewed by an audience lightly if not scornfully. The twentieth century exception to this rule which permits psychologic or psychopathic interest to compensate for sheer physical attraction is a convention peculiar to the later day.

In romantic love scenes of Elizabethan plays, a musical accompaniment is frequently noted, the reason for this convention doubtless being a recognition of the persuasive qualities of the art, coupled with the desire to employ the talents of the musicians who

were traditionally associated with a theatrical company. Such scenes as these are familiar: the melancholy lover thinking of his mistress and asking for someone to sing for him or play the lute; the lady thinking of her lover and calling for the same service; the lover composing a letter by music or laying plans as he listens to dulcet strains. One of the most popular scenes with music is the serenade with which the lover woos his mistress.

The lady's father is traditionally reluctant to accept the young man as a son-in-law. And the story therefore continues by having the hero disappear for a short time—long enough to assemble the disguise of a music teacher, singing teacher, writing teacher, or French doctor. Though the audience, trained by the constant repetition of this subterfuge, undoubtedly recognizes the charlatan who reappears, the father never fails to be deceived; he greets the stranger with enthusiasm and gives him a free run of the house. Therein, the young man customarily wastes no time in teaching his mistress the alphabet of love. An elopement usually follows this scene of the "love lesson." The clandestine marriage conventionally takes place off stage with an ease and dispatch that is one of the marvels of Elizabethan theatre mores. The ceremony can be performed with as much alacrity as Margaret insists upon in *Gentleman Usher*, IV, 1, where she says to her lover, "We must be married before our fathers come back from hunting," or as the Duke orders when he tells Angelo to wed Mariana in the last scene of *Measure for Measure*, "Go take her hence and marry her instantly," which feat is performed within the space of half a page.

If love at first sight is not a mutual reaction and the lady alone is enthusiastic, she is fully expected to follow after her lord in disguise and by ruse and devotion ultimately effect his surrender. The eager heroine in "breeches," seen often as a page to her lord and often laboring under the painful assignment of courting another lady in his behalf, presents a poignant picture. The conclusion of the story, however, as example proves, need give the audience no cause for anxiety, for the page does not fail to win her lord. The climax of any love-chase theme is conventionally reached by a recogni-

tion scene, a resuscitation or a revelation by means of the tomb-trick or the bed-trick. Such is the romantic gamut.

The satiric treatment of the love-chase theme is handled with irony and sarcasm. Each maid is considered a potential shrew or flirt and each man as a rake, a cuckold, or a tyrant. High on the list of its agenda, satire includes ridiculous lessons in the art of love and ridiculous love-making, both customarily overheard and thus further burlesqued. The satiric love sequence may come as the leit motif to a romantic plot, or it can be the chief matter of a satiric play.

The scene involving instructions for love-making is, according to its title, intrinsically satiric, though the degree of satiric emphasis is variable. The suitor sometimes maintains his dignity and it is only the instructor who is made to appear a fool, as in the case of the pompous Bassiolo who gives Vincentio needless hints for courtship in *The Gentleman Usher*, IV, 1; and in *All Fools*, II, 1, where the blustering Gostanza gives his son "kissing instructions," unnecessary directions since his son is already secretly married to the girl. In scenes of straight satire all the characters involved are burlesqued. Usually the teacher and the pupil are both of the stronger sex, and it is not uncommon to have one pose eagerly as "the lady." Amorphus in *Cynthia's Revels*, III, 5, makes exaggerated efforts to suggest "the loved one" while Asotus is inspired to court "her." The light French knight, Laverdure, is given ridiculous instructions in *What You Will* and in *Jeronimo I*, there is an incongruous and farcical scene in which Alcario, just prior to his murder, rehearses his protestations of love for Bel Imperia upon a helpful gentleman.

In many love scenes the mood is mixed, as in *Jack Drum*, II, 1, where three suitors serenade the beautiful Katherine, the last seriously and successfully, but the first two farcically. In the beginning the ridiculous, breathless Mr. Puff appears and requests his page to sing his song "Delicious beauty that doth lie, wrapt in skin of ivory." Katherine ignores him and he is followed by another suitor, the rich but repulsive Mamon whose witty page also sings for him,

wisely praising his money, which is his only attraction: "Chunk, chunk, chunk his bags do ring. A merry note with chunks to sing." Lucy in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, like Katherine, is a romantic character in a play with decided satiric overtones. She remains a disinterested party in the following brief and humorous encounter with the blunt Boyser in III, 2:

*Boyser:* Morrow

*Lucy:* As much to you

*Boyser:* I'll use few words, cans't love me?

*Lucy:* Deed no, sir.

*Boyser:* Why then, farewell, the way I came, I'll go.

Some love scenes are outspoken burlesque, like Will Cricket's proposal to Peggy in *Wily Beguiled*, scene 5. Peggy, it will be remembered, is the eager wench who does not know if she can love unless she kisses, and must therefore test every man she meets. Frog's love scene with Douce is similarly burlesqued in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, scene 7; as is the encounter between the servant Goffo and the maid in *The Wit of a Woman*, scene 8.

An effective satiric device is employed in *Blurt Master Constable* by having Fontinelle profess his affection for the courtezan Imperia, not with the traditional "soft music" conducive to love, but with the accompaniment of loud and deafening brass. Another device, already mentioned, magnifies the impact of satire in the love scenes between Troilus and Cressida, that of having a third party who listens and comments, rendering the lovers' intimacies public and banal.

#### PROPERTIES

Though playwrights have commonly, and often without conscious purpose, employed properties to convey atmosphere, characterization, and symbolism, they have always respected the efficacy of properties directed to a conscious purpose, such as the maintenance of suspense and the provocation of a climax. In theatres of all eras some of the most forceful scenes have been constructed around properties.

The varying degree of importance which a property possesses is illustrated by the macabre object of a skull as it is shown in three plays of the period under consideration. In IV, 1, of *The Honest Whore*, melancholy Hippolito is seen in a "closed and dark" room. He holds in his hand an unknown skull, a library piece, an impersonal object chosen solely as atmospheric effect for his soliloquy upon the tragedy of death. The skull used in the grave-digging scene of *Hamlet* (a play which was produced some two years before *The Honest Whore*) bears more personal significance, for it is recognized as belonging to poor Yorick, a gruesome fact which heightens the dramatic effect of Hamlet's famous soliloquy. In *Hoffman*, the action involving the bones of Hoffman's murdered father is essential to the development of the plot. In the first scene, Hoffman pulls aside the curtain of the inner stage and reveals his father's bones to the audience. In the second scene, after murdering Otho, he places the body behind the curtain with his father's. There both bodies lie, until Lucybell, who has gone mad, appears in V, 1, dressed in rich but mutilated and masculine attire. She rants and raves about the stage, as if searching for something. Suddenly, she uncovers the bones of Otho and Hoffman's father. She holds up the skulls, into which "crowns" have been burned. The recognition of these hideous objects provokes the climax of the play.

The most common dramatic properties, and of more pleasing nature than those just referred to, are all manner of love tokens, which are exchanged as marks of affection and which are used with varying degrees of emphasis during the development of the plot. In *All's Well* the rings and the final explanation of their passage from hand to hand effect the denouement of the play. In the last scene, when Bertram offers an engagement ring to Maudlin, the King recognizes it as the ring he once gave to Helena. Helena explains that she gave it to Bertram while disguised as Diana; and on her hand she shows a ring which Bertram believed he had given to Diana in exchange. Bertram has scornfully said early in the action that he would not love Helena till she had the ring off his finger and a child of his body. But when these seemingly impossible

things have been established as fact, Bertram completes the miracle by declaring his sudden love for Helena, and all ends well.

A sinister interpretation is given to the ring as a love token in *Lust's Dominion*. In this play Eleazar gives Isabelle a ring which she believes will protect her when she is in danger, but the ring in reality bears an opposite message, for Eleazar has instructed his assassins to fall upon the person whom they find wearing it.

In *Bussy d'Ambois*, II, 2, Montsury gives his wife Tamyra "a rope of pearl," which she gives at once, and without foresight, to Bussy d'Ambois as a symbol of her affection (III, 1). As is to be expected, when Montsury returns at night, he is surprised to find his wife not wearing the pearls, and his suspicions are aroused when she cannot explain their loss.

Not pearls but "two diamonds" belonging to Mistress Tenterhook stray into various hands in *Wesward Ho!*, but since this is a satiric comedy, the tense moment in which the husband demands that his wife produce the jewels is happily resolved. Quite without his knowledge, and through the cooperation of his own courtesan, the diamonds have been returned. In *Phoenix the Jeweler's Wife* gives the disguised hero a diamond, with the hopes that he will "oblige her." He accepts the stone with the ambiguous promise that it will make her known "in high places." When Phoenix reveals his true identity in the last scene, the diamond is proof against the faithless Jeweler's Wife, and in the hands of the high judge it is the means of her undoing.

One of the most celebrated dramatic properties is of course the handkerchief in *Othello*. The plot itself hangs upon the itinerary of this object. When the play opens, it is said that the Moor has given a handkerchief, richly embroidered with magic symbols, as a love token to his bride. He has explained to Desdemona that an old Egyptian gave it to his mother with the promise that as long as she possessed it she would keep her husband's love. It was given to Othello by his mother on her deathbed. At the moment in III, 3, when Othello complains of an excruciating pain in his head, Desdemona impulsively pulls forth the handkerchief and offers to bind

his brow. Othello scorns such attention, and in her solicitude over his discomfort Desdemona does not realize that the handkerchief has dropped from her hand. Her maid Emilia picks it up innocently enough and is about to return it when Iago, Emilia's husband, seizes the handkerchief from her. He realizes the power which this object can be made to exert, and with satanic inspiration he plots to make the handkerchief the means of ruining Cassio, Desdemona, and even Othello himself.

Properties possessing magic powers are used most frequently to explain action which would otherwise be hard to understand, such as Charlemagne's macabre infatuation for his dead queen and later his farcical attachment to Bishop Turpin. Both these strange passions are shown to result from the wearing of a "witchcraft ring," any possessor of which makes Charlemagne mad with love. The burning robe and crown (those gruesome devices of the traditional Hercules and Medea stories) are conventionally shown in III, 4, of *Alaham* in which the vengeful Hala prepares a poisoned crown and mantle for her usurping lord on the day "he doth consummate all his joy." In V, 1, this victorious villain, soliloquizing upon his power, triumphantly tries on the crown and mantle and instantly cries out in agony as he begins to be consumed by fire. A comic interpretation of this scene is shown in V, 5, of *Lingua* where the drunken Tactus cries for help as he imagines that he is "burning Hercules."

#### DISGUISE

The most common plot device, both in Elizabethan comedy and tragedy, is disguise. Disguise is employed for spying, for plotting, for love-making, or solely for the amusement which it affords the audience. Angelo, in *May Day*, II, testifies to the frequency with which this stage action was used by crying in desperation: "Out you . . . disguise is worn bare upon every stage!" This particular disguise is the common one of masquerading as a man of the cloth, a disguise employed in *The Noble Soldier*, *Lust's Dominion*, *The Thracian Wonder*, *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, *Measure for*

*Measure, The Malcontent, Twelfth Night, The Fair Maid of Bris-  
tow, Hoffman, The Merry Devil, Bussy d'Ambois, and The Hon-  
est Whore.*

There are two types of disguise, those which are enforced and those which are voluntary. In the first instance, the character assumes a different appearance because of desperate necessity; if his true identity is discovered, it is assumed that he will be in acute physical danger. A character usually undertakes a disguise of this type if he wishes to remain on the scene, and, unknown to his enemies, rebuild his fortunes, like Momford who disguises as the Blind Beggar and Malevole as the Malcontent.

The voluntary type of disguise may be assumed by a character who is not in a position of danger but is guided solely by an antic disposition of the moment, as King Henry when he goes "larking," or Feste when he tantalizes Malvolio. In both cases there is no object involved other than the character's own "humor," pleasure, and diversion. It is usual, however, for voluntary disguises to be adopted with more purpose than this. The romantic lover who encounters superficial difficulties is known to find a quick and assured access to his mistress by the means of any flimsy disguise. Comical lovers, on the other hand, are expected to go to more pains. Little Lorenzo, the "amorous old squire" in *May Day*, is gullible enough to accept Angelo's suggestion that he disguise as a chimney sweep. Angelo assists the old senator in borrowing clothes from Snail, the chimney sweep, he even dresses Lorenzo, and, to make his appearance the more convincing, he blackens his face. By the time the disguise is effected, Angelo avows that the old lover is the blackest chimney sweep he has ever seen. Lorenzo thanks him heartily and goes his way, while Angelo with great anticipation hides to watch the encounter. To Angelo's satisfaction, he sees Franceschina greet Lorenzo by throwing him into the coal house. This scene is reminiscent of a moment in *The Merry Wives* and also of a moment in the early play of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*.

The ruse of blackface is significant to the plot of *Lust's Dominion*

where it is used as a final trick to provoke the climax. In this scene Philip and Hortenzo disguise themselves to represent the Moorish henchmen of Eleazar, blacking their faces to make the disguise perfect (after they have murdered the men and put on their clothes). When Eleazar enters, he commands his supposed followers to kill the royal family, but the disguised Philip and Hortenzo at this moment seize and bind Eleazar, and free his victims.

The man of many disguises is well illustrated by the leading merchant in *Westward Ho!*, Justiniano, who dedicates himself, first, to the testing of his wife, and then, when he finds her highly susceptible, to her protection. During the course of the play Justiniano appears disguised as a writing master, a collier, and finally as his own wife, whose place he takes at her rendezvous with the old Earl. In this scene the old Earl entertains his "mistress" by ordering the customary love-banquet, with musical accompaniment. He courts his fair companion according to the usual routine, until, at the crucial moment "she" unmasks and "reveals a devil harpy" in the shape of the lady's husband. Justiniano tells the astonished Earl that he has poisoned his wife for her sin, and instantly, as if to prove the statement, he orders her "corpse" brought in. Moll is borne onto the stage and, being the victim of a potion rather than poison, she soon revives. The stricken Earl thinks that he is being confronted with her ghost but, after this entertaining notion has been sufficiently dramatized, Justiniano reassures the Earl that he is not being haunted but that he has been tricked. The shaken nobleman derives such relief from this intelligence that he insists upon giving Moll a quantity of rich clothes and jewels. It soothes his conscience, he says. Justiniano, being a realistic merchant, accepts these generous gifts with no reaction other than pleasure.

The disguise of a member of one sex as a person of the other is common, the most usual form being that of a girl who assumes the habit of a boy. It is customary for an amorous maiden to disguise as a page in order to pursue the man of her choice, cross-country; the discovery of her identity is crucial in the unraveling of the plot.

Five "breeches" heroines appear in plays of the period and, interesting to note, in plays supposed to have been produced in leap years.

In the concluding scene of *The Four Prentices*, Guy receives the hand of a beautiful woman, "The Lady of France," from whom he departed long since. As the matter of her past whereabouts is discussed, Guy is overcome to discover that for some time past this Lady has been disguised as his page, Jack. "Beshrew her," he cries, "she hath been my bedfellow a year and more, yet I had not the grace!"

In addition to these persistent followers, certain other women appear for a brief time in men's clothing. Anabel presents herself as "the man willing to die" for the worthless Vallenger in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, and the discovery of her true identity is the climax of the play. The second Lucy in *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* is not so important to the plot, though she furthers it considerably by her disguise as a serving boy to the Wise Woman. Franceschina, the wife of the braggart Quintilliano in *May Day*, and the lady courted by old Lorenzo in blackface, appears before the play is over as a page, but her disguise is mainly for the purpose of rough humor, since her bibulous husband proclaims unflatteringly that he knows her "by her big thighs and her splay feet."

The disguise device is used with ingenuity in the case of Lucretia in the same play. This lady seems impervious to all sexual temptation, despite the efforts of many to involve her. The explanation for her reluctance is given when Lodovico, a suitor, appears in distress and announces that his mistress is a man. "Lucretia" further admits that as a man he loved one Theagine, and the last surprise of the play is given by the revelation that Lionel, the page, is Theagine in disguise; so all ends happily through a double metamorphosis.

The interesting device of two men disguised as the same person, reminiscent of the Amphitryon story, appears in Marston's *What You Will*, where Francesco, the perfumer, endeavors to make himself resemble Albano the merchant who has long been abroad. The

difficulty and humor of the impersonation in this case is increased by the fact that Francesco is forced to attempt the Merchant's physical handicap of stuttering. In *Jeronimo I* the twin disguise is interpreted with violence. The villain, Lorenzo, neglects to inform his "tool," Lazarotto, that Alcario, the man they are supporting, is going to disguise as Don Andrea for a moment to enjoy the love of Bel Imperia. When, unknowingly, Lazarotto enters and sees two people together whom he believes to be Bel Imperia and Don Andrea, he kills by mistake the man he was employed to aid.

As a variation of the disguise device, there is the situation in which the character poses as someone else, to a person who does not recognize him. Master Ford, for instance, informs Falstaff, who apparently has seen much of Mistress Ford but has never met her husband, that he is Master Brook. "Brook" says that he is willing to pay Falstaff generously if he will assist him in his love suit to a certain married lady whom he finds attractive, by name, Mistress Ford. Falstaff accepts the offer with relish and alacrity.

Mother Gruel does not recognize her son Andrew in *Michaelmas Term*, but this may perhaps be accounted for by her explanation that her sight is dim; or by his explanation that his "glories disguise him." However, Mother Gruel's lack of recognition of her son runs counter to the classic convention of the "call of blood" which is the usual interpretation, evidenced by Bess and her father in *The Blind Beggar*, Radagan and Ariadne in *The Thracian Wonder*, and Arthur and Mistress Arthur in *The Good Wife*.

#### THE RUSE OR TRICK

Hand in hand with the device of disguise goes that of the ruse or trick, involving elaborate fabrications based upon the conventional lie. There appears to be a tacit agreement among all characters to believe any lie which is spoken. The regularity with which this easy device is employed to develop the plot provokes the remark, not unjustifiably, that without the convention of the lie most of the action in Elizabethan plays would come to a halt.

Customarily, a lie conceives the action of the original trick, and a

counterlie overcomes the action with another trick. To take an example: Winifred, the witty lady's maid in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, assures gullible Jack that if he wishes to spend the night with her, he must climb into a sack which she will arrange to have someone carry to Holloway. He eagerly agrees. Winifred then has it explained to Monsieur de John that she will be in the sack, and with this pleasant prospect in mind, he joyfully agrees to carry it to Holloway. A few moments later Monsieur de John staggers off the stage with "Winifred" who weighs more than he had believed possible, but the weight of Winifred is only the first of a series of disillusionments in store for him.

The first trick in *Sir Giles Goosecap* is similarly surpassed by a second. The pages lie to their foolish knights, saying that the ladies are filled with love and are eager to meet their suitors in the early morning at Barnet, which is about ten miles away. This tryst is a hoax and when the knights next appear they are infuriated and exhausted, having waited all day at the appointed spot for ladies who never arrived. The scheming pages quiet them, however, with a new lie, the assurance that the ladies (who in reality knew nothing about the supposed rendezvous) were endeavoring to overcome their patience, and, therefore, the cruellest manner of treating the ladies would be to go forth and meet them again without revealing a word of the affair. Thus the pages persuade the eager suitors to rush forth to their next gulling.

A *lazzi* ruse is used effectively in *Lingua*, scene 7, where blustering Tactus, in the act of making off with the coveted robe and crown, sees Olfactus approaching. Tactus "wraps up the robe and crown, and sits upon them." Olfactus is amazed at finding him in this position and questions him. Tactus, desperately clutching at the best lies which come to mind, says that he was coming from Phantastes' house, where he suddenly felt himself turning into glass, so he sat down, only to discover that he had turned into "a perfect urinal." He urges his enemy to depart to the city for a case to fit him. The suspense of this business is increased by having

Olfactus depart by one of the three stage doors and Visus enter immediately by another. Tactus hurries with the crown and robe toward the last remaining door but Gustus appears at this and Tactus is reduced to desperation.

The aims toward which ruses are directed are conventionally materialistic, such as the desire for power in tragedy, or, in comedy, the desire for money or the pleasures money affords. A typical scheme of the father desirous of improving the family fortune by marrying his daughter to a wealthy man is illustrated by Sir Arthur Clare in *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. Sir Arthur feels no compunction in breaking Millicent's engagement to her lover, though he is fully conscious of the intimate relationship which has existed between them over a period of years. He lies to his daughter and to his wife by saying that he wishes to send Millicent to a convent, for, in reality, he plots to marry her to a gallant with an ample purse. Sir Arthur is not conscious, however, of the power of the forces that oppose him; these include his son, and his son's friend, the resourceful lover, as well as the formidable figure of the co-operative Devil of Edmonton.

The sick-ruse is a common trick in the satiric interpretation of the love-chase. Mistress Honisuckle's excuse that her "child-at-nurse" is ill gives the four merchants' wives the opportunity for their excursion to Brainford. Later, at the inn, when the situation becomes ticklish, Mistress Tenterhook finds it expedient to play sick herself. The Duchess in *The Malcontent* finds sickness and the attendant confinement to her room the most agreeable way of meeting her gallant. The reverse situation, of the man who feigns illness in the desire of being visited by a lady, is shown in IV, 3, of *Sir Giles Goosecap*, where Clarence plays sick in the desperate hope of securing sympathy from the frigid Eugenia. Clarence's devoted friend Momford, who chances to be Eugenia's uncle, assists in the plot which is devised in the following manner: Dr. Versay is to be called and Momford will lead Eugenia down the hall "to show the pictures that lie near [Clarence's] chamber." As they

pass, she will hear the doctor giving the grave pronouncements which he has been instructed to deliver, and if she has any heart at all, she will rush to Clarence's arms at once.

#### BRIBERY AND MURDER

The cooperation of Momford is motivated solely by the powerful force of friendship, a state of amity which is emphasized in all forms of Elizabethan literature; its superiority to romantic love being frequently argued, often persuasively, as in *Damon and Pithias*. However, despite Momford's wholehearted and purely altruistic desire to help his friend, it is probable that Dr. Versay's interest results from the less complex and more common inducement of a bribe.

Bribery appears, from a reading of the plays, to be an extremely common stage device, if not the reflection of an accepted social practice. Pence, shillings, angels (usually a pun), testars, and groats are continually expended to buy forbidden pleasures. For a nominal sum almost anyone will supply information, tell a lie, arrange a rendezvous or carry a message. So many directions are given for the recompense of pages and maids who perform these agreeable services that one is inclined to think that their wages were on a commission basis. At least during the period of courtship a lady could expect her gallant to support her servant. Exceedingly rare is the instance of a servant refusing remuneration; or, to carry the statement further, it is exceedingly rare when a character of any social sphere refuses. When the maimed soldier Stump, in *The Alarum for London* declines to accept jewels from the rich and hated Burgher's Wife (delivering a diatribe as he does so), the scene assumes, and perhaps rightly, the proportions of an act of heroism.

Women's honor is customarily bought at a price, and, though the niggardly Jacob van Smelt offers Oriana free lodging "for a consideration," most women are given costly inducements: precious stones, diamonds, pearls, rings, "braces of bracelets," rich raiment, and promised endowments. Occasionally, it is the woman who

bribes the gallant, as in the case of the Jeweler's Wife in *Phoenix*, who offers the Knight a hundred and fifty angels if he will "whirl" her door and come to her secretly. The Jeweler's Wife also offers the disguised Phoenix a diamond if he will perform the same service. Viola in *The Honest Whore* pays her brother forty pounds to "cousin" her in front of her husband; and Helena bribes the Florentine Widow with a bag of gold and promises the Widow's daughter, Diana, a dowry of three thousand pounds if they will arrange to let her take Diana's place when Bertram comes to the garden.

Bribery is a common tool for plots other than those of love: the services of Lorique are easily bought in *Hoffman*; as are those of Lazarotto, the discontented courtier, in *Jeronimo I*; while in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* Ned Holmes betrays the Duke of Suffolk for a thousand marks; and in *When You See Me* it is said of Wolsey that he paid the Emperor Charles sixty thousand pounds to further his Papal prospects.

The offer of a bribe to murder a man involves one of the most interesting phenomena of the Elizabethan theatre—the apparently ever-available pool of professional assassins within easy call. Customarily, these ruffians are brought on stage, and, though completely unknown to the prospective employer, they are at once found acceptable. They in turn, without hesitation or questioning, express their eagerness to murder anyone specified, in return for a small remuneration. So the murder is planned, invariably without the slightest apprehension on the part of the employer, although the performance of the crime rarely turns out according to his expectations.

After having agreed to kill someone, assassins frequently change their minds, like Hadland whom the Cardinal employs along with Canbee to murder the Duke of Gloucester in *The Blind Beggar*. At the moment when Gloucester is in their power, one murderer has a change of heart and refuses to go through with the crime. The same situation is found in *The Maid's Metamorphosis* when the paid assassins, Orestes and Phylander, encounter their intended victim, Eurymine. Orestes "makes to strike her with a sword," but

Phylander, like Hadland, stays his hand. The murderers take pity on the Maid. They remove her "veil of Lawn," drench it in the blood of a goat and say they will present it to the Duke along with the heart of the animal, as proof that she has been killed. In *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, Mamon bribes Monsieur de John to kill Pasquill, but the former has no intention of carrying out his commission and bears word of the plot to its victim at once; Herbert in *The Fair Maid of Bristow* and Malheureux in *The Dutch Courtezan* likewise have no thought of poisoning the men they have been asked to kill, but on the contrary, make strenuous efforts to save their lives. In *The Malcontent* there is an ingenious use of cross-purpose, in the scene where Mendoza hires the Duke to poison Malevole and Malevole to poison the Duke. One notes in a study of the plays that it is a clever assassin who changes his mind, for conscientious murderers who perform the deed according to the letter are conventionally dispatched themselves soon afterward by their nervous employers.

Poison, the sword, and the pistol are the conventional agents of death. The last is not an uncommon property. It is mentioned often, the most casual reference, perhaps, being in V, 1, of *Jack Drum*, where Brabant Jr. tells his servant to shoot his best friend because he believes the friend has stolen his mistress' affection. The use of a pistol or of a sword implies that the one attacked, if he is a man, is probably armed and can defend himself. If the protagonist encounters the enemy himself, if both are armed and both fight fairly and the outcome is the desired slaughter, the protagonist loses none of his self-respect and is free to rejoice in his supremacy. It is only when a protagonist considers murdering a defenseless person that he feels the pangs of conscience. Hamlet suffers from this when he comes to attack Claudius and finds him at prayer. In a similar way Hoffman's resolution is shaken when he finds his intended victim sleeping on the ground.

Poison, as a method of murder, cannot ethically claim the same respect as pure slaughter, since it assumes that the victim is caught

unaware and is wholly unprotected. It is an unfair death-trick. It might also be termed impractical for, though the protagonist never seems to foresee the possibility, the dose is sure to be administered to the wrong person or persons.

#### HIDING

When poison is administered in a comedy it is conventionally one of two kinds, the first being the hideous "oil of toads" which a vengeful person throws at a woman's face, leaving it "spotted like a panther's skin." This cruel "ruination of the face" is not only a dramatically effective device, but one which actors can demonstrate realistically. Though painfully humiliating to the heroine in the story, poison applied to the face is never fatal. In the last scene the heroine customarily "reappears veiled," and throwing off her mask, reveals a face more beautiful than ever, miraculously cured by some "beldame's herbs" (and the rubbing off of paint). The second form of poison, usually administered in a cup, turns out to be in reality a "harmless potion" which causes the victim to fall into a deep sleep closely resembling death, but from which he awakes in due course. Often, at the dramatic scene of awakening, a friend appears and promises wholehearted assistance in reestablishing the victim's fortunes, offering him a quiet hiding place, either till he sufficiently recovers to present himself or till the moment seems right. This retreat of a character to convalesce in hiding is a common practice which is not limited to the victims of potions. Such a retreat is frequently enjoyed by characters who have fallen in conflict and are left, as dead, on the stage, where they are customarily discovered by some kind person who, finding that a spark of life remains, carries them off and nurses them back to health.

Certain individuals devise of themselves some trick of hiding until "things fadge." This type of disappearance is usually for the purpose of furthering the plot, and the emphasis is placed not upon the hiding itself but upon the surprising emergence of the person

later in the play, like the young heir, Sebastian, in *The Noble Soldier* and the supposedly murdered Lucybell in *Hoffman* and Mistress Arthur in *The Good Wife*.

The humorous interpretation of the device of hiding stresses the act itself. The scene in which a guilty person hides in the hot, uncomfortable and humiliating confines of a closet or trunk, or stands precariously behind a screen or arras, has always had dramatic appeal, not the least part of which is based upon the audience's delight in its superior knowledge, together with its amusement in the double entendre of conversation and its anticipation of the character's ultimate discovery. The hiding scene affords tempting possibilities to the actor, who can immeasurably heighten the suspense by resorting to physical *lazzi* and *extempore*—an uncontrollable impulse to cough, to sneeze, to contradict, and the like.

Simple retreats into Dr. Caius' closet in *The Merry Wives*, and Falstaff in IV, 2, not only seeks shelter behind Mistress Ford's arras but makes his immortal decision to hide in the dense and evil-smelling basket of dirty linen. Master Honisuckle nervously occupies a closet for some time at the courtezan's house in *Westward Ho!*, forced there by the visit of another of Lucy's admirers, whose voice he soon recognizes as that of one of his friends. Crispinus suffers in the closet of the affected flirt Chloe for part of a scene in *The Poetaster*, when she is suddenly visited by her husband, while Gerardine in *The Family of Love* actually lives during a considerable portion of the play in the cramped confines of a trunk.

Tysefew and Lionel in *The Dutch Courtezan* and Lurdos in *Law Tricks* all take refuge "behind the arras." The first two are acting as a party in ambush and as such are heavily armed and in no personal danger. Avaricious old Lurdos, however, is an eavesdropper and has to endure the pricks of the gallants' swords when these gentlemen suddenly and without provocation start lunging at a figure of Vulcan which is woven on the tapestry. This scene is reminiscent of the famous one in *Hamlet* (a play of at least two years before), in which the situation takes a tragic turn when Polonius, also eavesdropping behind the arras, takes up the Queen's

cry for help. Hamlet, startled, grasps his sword and blindly and with marvelous accuracy and dispatch kills Polonius like "a rat."

#### CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE

Long death lists are a characteristic of Elizabethan plays and, though by far the greatest number of the deceased are murdered, a few are killed accidentally, a few die by sentence of the law, a few by natural causes, and a few commit suicide. Much has been written on the subject of the Elizabethan attitude toward suicide, and it is interesting to note in a study of the plays produced between 1600 and 1605 that a character rarely takes his own life except when the action slavishly imitates the classic model, in which the custom of suicide was considered as a brave and commendable deed. Many Elizabethans contemplate suicide, "offer" to kill themselves as it is said, but few actually do so.

A character conventionally contemplates suicide in a moment of overwhelming grief, caused often by frustrated love: as in the case of Katherine in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, Margaret in *Gentleman Usher* (she ultimately poisons her face), Aminadab, the pedant, in *The Good Wife*, Beatrice in *The Dutch Courtezan*, and Bellafront in *The Honest Whore*. Mathius in *Hoffman* is prompted by remorse, when in III, 1 he realizes that he has been tricked into killing his own brother. He cries out in horror, "Hold me not. . . . I will revenge myself upon myself!" All of these characters, however, "forbear" from perpetrating the deed; only a few, like the Duke of Austria in *Hoffman*, Othello, Ophelia, Dymnus in *Philotas*, and Ned Holmes in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* actually take their lives. The Duke of Austria and Othello are prompted by remorse. Ophelia is prompted by grief, but her action loses conscious force, since she is out of her mind when she takes her life. In the case of Dymnus and Ned Holmes, suicide is an escape from a sentence of death. Ned Holmes, the betrayer of the Duke of Suffolk, hangs himself on the stage in scene 9 of *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, while Dymnus dies in Act III, scene 1, of *Philotas*—an effective scene in which he is carried on to the stage after he has

stabbed himself and all wait in breathless suspense for his confession, which could save Philotas; but he dies without uttering a word.

## MADNESS

When characters, crazed with grief, turn their thoughts to suicide, it is a conventional time for them to go mad. Lucybell in *Hoffman*, recovering from her own wounds, goes mad when she hears that her lover has been killed; Pasquill goes mad when he sees the ravages wrought on Katherine's face. Ophelia goes mad, with the frustration of her love, and with grief for her father's death; and Hamlet's madness is also provoked by his father's death. In this tragedy, the madness of the hero is effectively used as the directing force of the plot.

The so-called "good people" in a comedy are conventionally cured of their madness, only such an excrement as Mamon in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* is left to languish "at the mercy of Bedlam's whips." Pasquill, in the same play, is cured by looking on Katherine's restored face and by the balm of music which "purifies his senses." There is a traditional affinity between madness and music, as illustrated by the vintner in *The Dutch Courtezan* who calls for quiet music "to save his wits" at the end of each act. Harsh, wild music, on the other hand, is considered to be a means of inducing madness, music such as Eleazar employs to madden his prisoners in *Lust's Dominion*.

In satire, the cause of madness is often wittily abstract, as in the case of Mamon who is demented "with usury" or Tangle in *The Phoenix* who is "mad with the law" (a state reminiscent of that affecting Aristophanes' Philocleon). The depiction of insanity was apparently thought so amusing that it was frequently used for the purpose of atmosphere or for extraneous humor. In *The Honest Whore*, Candido and Bellafront's temporary insanity seems a means only to present a varied group of Bedlam's inmates. These madmen are presented realistically and in detail: The First Madman with a net, fishing for five ships; The Second Madman, a

jilted lover; and *The Third Madman*, a jealous husband. The jilted lover and the jealous husband fall upon each other and, when the latter knocks the former down, the jilted lover insists that he is dead and must be buried. Such a scene clearly afforded histrionic opportunities for the actors as well as amusement for the Elizabethan spectators, who appear not infrequently, to have visited Bedlam itself for the purpose of being entertained by the merry antics of the lunatics.

### *Climaxes*

#### DISCOVERY

The climax of a play is the crucial moment of the action, the encounter toward which all conflict has moved and all suspense has been directed, the inevitable scene of decision and change.

The discovery scene or revelation through report are the most common types of climax in classic plays. At the climax of a Greek tragedy it is customary for the protagonist to make the sickening discovery of his victim's identity, or discover his own identity (possibly lost in a moment of insanity), or it may be the moment when he realizes the enormity of his crime. In Roman comedy the discovery is apt to be of a more pleasant nature: the slave girl turns out to be an Athenian citizen and as such is worthy of becoming her lover's bride; a man discovers that his wife's child is in reality his own child, since his wife is the unknown girl he seduced at the festival of the Tauropolia. One of the characteristics of the classic climax by discovery is that the knowledge revealed at the crucial moment has long been enjoyed by the audience, and it is only the characters who are surprised, as their fates and fortunes are suddenly and radically changed. Both revelation by report and the discovery scene are familiar conventions in the Elizabethan theatre. *All Fools* illustrates the first and less dramatic form in which an arbitrary disclosure of the true state of affairs is at last made. The fact that Valerio is married to Gratiana and Fortunio to Bellanora

are the thin secrets by which the plot has hung for five acts through the sheer determination of the author.

In the classic discovery scene the character customarily announces himself and endeavors to establish his identity by showing some mark on his body or by revealing some significant property, such as a ring or a token. When the mark or property is recognized by some of the people present, the character's identity is at once re-established. This type of discovery scene is employed in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*. In this play young Ferdinand has been condemned to death for abducting the daughter of the Duke of Brabant, on the grounds that "the law adjudges death to him that steals the heir of any Prince, that's not a Prince that doth commit the act." The reaction of the audience to this pronouncement is one of suspense rather than of surprise, because they have known<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand's identity from the time of the dumb show in the prologue, and the question is simply that of establishing his claim to the title of Prince. When the fact is revealed that the infant who was abandoned on the river bank wore "a muckiter" and a band marked with an "F," the Duke of Bullen rises precipitously and claims Ferdinand as his long-lost son "Frederick." "Frederick" is at once accepted with thanksgiving, and as a "Prince" he is free of all charges against him.

The climax of Shakespeare's *All's Well* results, as has been said, from the identification of two rings which give a happy solution to Bertram's riddle. In *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* the manifold complications of where to bestow fair Phyllis' hand are also solved by an answer to a riddle. "I would I could content you all," she says and asks the three brothers what they wish from her. "Your love!" Ferdinand cries. "Your love and life!" says Anthony. "Every part of you!" insists Frank, and, according to logic, she gives her hand to Frank, saying that all the others can be satisfied with friendship.

Because disguise is used so frequently in Elizabethan plays, the act of discovery is often simplified to a mere "unmasking" of characters. In *The Blind Beggar*, Momford, at the appropriate time

casts off his beggar's rags and is recognized forthwith. In *Phoenix* the climax is also controlled by the main character's arbitrary timing of his self-revelation. After the mysteriously accurate report of Proditur's villainies in the realm have been read in the form of "The Brief of Phoenix' Travels," Phoenix throws off his disguise and confronts the villainous Proditur, charging him with the attempt to murder Phoenix's father, the old Duke.

The climax of *The London Prodigal* is achieved through two discoveries. At the moment that Young Flowerdale is to be led off to prison, his patient wife Lucy abandons her role of a Dutch frau and delivers an eloquent plea for mercy toward her erring husband. This demonstration of loyalty and love not only converts Young Flowerdale but it also moves Old Flowerdale to cast off his disguise as his son's serving man, and to reward Lucy for her goodness by offering her a dowry three times the size of that originally promised by her own father.

The climax of *The Malcontent* is composed of a series of discoveries during the progress of a masked ball. Marston, with his feeling for language and sound, effectively manipulates a double entendre for every measure of music and every word of speech. The actual moment of revelation comes simply and suddenly when all the dancers unmask.

An instance of the discovery of a character against her will is shown in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, when Anabel presents herself dressed as a man in order to spare the life of Vallenger, whom King Richard has condemned to death unless he can show another man "willing to yield his life." No sooner does Anabel appear at one door, apparently a rather unconvincing looking man, than Challener, the perfect friend, presents himself at the opposite door. During the argument as to which of these noble spirits will allow the other to make the supreme sacrifice, Anabel's identity is discovered. The King is enraged at her attempted "bafflement" of the laws and demands her life, at which point the ever-ready Challener offers to die for both Anabel and Vallenger. Another discovery scene is needed to resolve these difficulties, and the one which

is forthcoming is of the arbitrary type, the death-trick, a version of the climax device of the master trick, a subject now to be considered.

#### THE MASTER TRICK

The Elizabethans preferred to demonstrate the device of discovery not through the classic speech of revelation but by means of a trick. In most Elizabethan plays, as has already been indicated, tricks are freely employed prior to the climax, which makes it logical that the problems of the plot should ultimately be solved by a master trick, most commonly a form either of the death-trick or of the bed-trick.

Though the death-trick may be used at any time, as initial action in *The Maid's Metamorphosis* and *The Honest Whore*, or as medial action in *Lust's Dominion*, *Jack Drum*, *Westward Ho!* and *The Dutch Courtezan*, it is particularly effective as the climax. The "dead" Sentlo's appearance in *The Fair Maid of Bristow* saves the lives of Vallenger and Anabel, the awakening of Celestine in *Satiromastix* outwits the King, Lacy's resuscitation vindicates the Devil in *Grim the Collier*, and the reviving of the Countess in *Law Tricks* and Mistress Arthur in *The Good Wife* saves in each case the husband's life. In the last instance Heywood employs a delayed climax. In the tomb scene, IV, 1, he has Mistress Arthur discovered, as she wakes, by a sympathetic friend who offers her a place of refuge and nurses her back to health; thus the climactic encounter of Young Arthur and his "dead" wife is delayed for four more scenes.

Victims of the death-trick have customarily succumbed to a poison which is in reality a harmless potion. There is a distinction, in the application of this purported poison: it is either administered by a sympathetic character who knows the innocent qualities of the drug and is confident that the ruse will aid the character's fortunes, as in *Satiromastix*; or it is administered with a murderous intent, as in *Law Tricks* and *The Good Wife*, in which case, the victim's return to life is a profound and unpleasant shock to the "murderer."

A variation of the death-trick is the head-trick, which is shown

with double emphasis in *Measure for Measure*. In this play the substitute head of a dead pirate is brought forth to "prove" that Barnardine, the likable criminal, has finally been put to death, "despite his persuasion"; in the second instance, Claudio's head is shown to prove his execution. This latter character reappears in the last scene "muffled," and the discovery of his identity, together with that of the Duke, provides the climax of the play.

An ingenious death-trick occurs in *Michaelmas Term* when the niggardly Quomodo feigns his own death for the dangerous pleasure of seeing what happens thereafter; IV, 4, shows the realistic scene of his funeral which he attends in the disguise of a beadle. He watches with pleasure the grieving of his wife when his coffin is brought in. Her old mother tries to comfort her and she swoons. Master Easy, whom Quomodo has swindled, then tries to comfort Mistress Quomodo. Disguised as the beadle, Quomodo presses forward eagerly to demand his "due," but he drops back in desperation when he learns that the Priest is staying on to marry his wife to Master Easy. From this moment on, for all his insistence, no one will accept the fact that Quomodo is still alive.

The bed-trick, as well as the death-trick, is a familiar climax for comedy. It is often used to unravel action which has become so confused that a happy conclusion seems impossible until startling news is revealed, for instance, that the woman who was thought to be seduced is in reality the supposed transgressor's wife. This device, found in such plays as Plautus' *Aulularia* and Terence's *Hecyra*, was a firmly established convention of Roman comedy. It remained popular in the Elizabethan theatre, for it was a sound and effective dramatic practice, and served, as well, the purposes of moral justification.

In *Blurt Master Constable*, V, 2, plucky Violetta pleads with the courtezan Imperia to let her take her place when Fontinelle comes to the bawdy house. In the climax of the play the Duke declares that if Fontinelle has stained the honor of Violetta's bed, he dies; thereupon, his devoted wife, by the revelation of this trick, is able to save his life. It was in this same way, as has been said, that

Helena tricked Bertram during that "wordless hour" in the garden in *All's Well*.

An instance in which the trick is played with the purpose of evasion rather than participation is that in which the lovely and cool-headed Isabella arranges to have Mariana, who was once betrothed to Angelo, take her place at the forced meeting in *Measure for Measure*.

A novel variation of the bed-trick appears in *The Royal King*, in which the loyal but wily Marshal manipulates events so that he is in the end able to present the King, not with his true wife, but with a far more surprising gift, a jeweled cradle containing an unknown but "true heir of his body."

In the use of the bed-trick it is conventional that the man is the one who is deceived, while the woman and any persons enjoying her confidence are fully aware of the true situation. These conspirators customarily share the pleasure of their secret with the audience.

#### THE FIGHT TO THE FINISH

Many climaxes of Elizabethan plays are fought out, amid noise and confusion, upon the battle field of the stage. The popularity of the scene of "pitched battle" is a clear indication of a basic difference between classic and Elizabethan play construction. Though all the classic plays dealing with the Trojan legend or that of the sons of Oedipus are predicated upon war, as are most of the comedies of Aristophanes, it was not the classic convention to portray scenes of battle, but merely to report by messenger the progress or outcome of the conflict. To the Elizabethan, however, the portrayal of battle scenes was a commonplace, and for the manifest pleasure of the sixteenth century audience it is assumed that authors, producers, and actors made the fight as realistic and bloody as the staging facilities permitted.

Some plays, in addition to having a scene of battle as a climax, have the atmosphere of war as a background, such as *The Four Prentices*, *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* and *Sir Thomas Wyatt*. *Lust's Dominion* and *Jeronimo I* are laid during the "war between

Spain and Portugal," a conflict which rivaled the Trojan war in its literary appeal. The Trojan war, of course, is the setting for *Troilus and Cressida*, and the last seven scenes are a brilliant portrayal of battle action, short exciting episodes which pile up momentum for the inescapable climax.

In *All's Well*, the battle for Florence is significant to the action, and in *The Thracian Wonder* the entire last act shows the progress of the conflict between the forces of Sicily and Thrace. *The Alarum for London*, as has been previously indicated, is a naturalistic and ominous interpretation of the fall of Antwerp, the siege of this city being the substance of the plot.

The action of "single combat" is an obligatory scene which takes place during the course of a battle. It is an encounter between two main characters, a fight to the death. A "single combat" scene often provokes the climax of a play, as in *The Four Prentices*, where the climax is reached by the means of a series of "single combats" and a series of recognitions. The directions read: "Enter the four brothers, each kills a pagan king and takes a crown." Immediately afterward they begin to fight among themselves, but a happy climax is reached when they recognize each other and make a distribution of prizes. The climax of *The Thracian Wonder* also comes through a series of recognitions during the course of battle. In *Troilus and Cressida* the climax is reached through a series of single combats: Troilus against Diomed, the bastard Thersites against the bastard Margarelon, Menelaus against Paris, and Achilles against Hector.

*The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* presents a series of engagements in the war of Spain against France and the next to the last scene shows the battle at its most desperate pitch. The obligatory scene of single combat follows, but since, because of the demands of the plot only half the complications can be solved by the slaughter of the Spanish aggressors, a judgment scene concludes the action.

The allegorical play of *Lingua* shows elaborate preparations being made for the battle between the senses, each sense contending for superiority. Visus is described as encamped upon the right hand of a spacious hill with three thousand eagles as marshals, the captain

being the celebrated bird who carried off Ganemeyde. The eagles are backed by falcons, haggards, goshawks, sparrowhawks, and other ravenous birds. Opposite Visus is Tactus with four hundred tortoises and a troop of ugly spiders who with their own gut have strung a cordage to the moon. Gustus commands an endless multitude of desperate apes, five hundred marmosets, and long-tailed monkeys. He is armed with turnip shot behind ramparts of "pastie crust and forts of pie." Olfactus stands with four hundred hungry hounds and mastiffs and a cloud of vultures. One would assume that the climax of the play would be brought about through the action of this promised battle, but at the moment when hostilities begin, the author turns his attention to the accusation and trial of Lingua, who is contending for recognition as a sixth sense. One anticipates that the climax of this judgment scene will come in Act IV, scene 7; but the author this time withholds the conclusion by having Lingua defy the sentence passed upon her, that she is only half a sense. She continues her resistance throughout Act V which is composed of the unprecedented number of twenty scenes, and in the last, the climax of the play is reached by a second judgment scene.

The device, in the projected conflict of *Lingua*, of translating every blow into a figure of speech is an example of an increasingly popular trend in the satiric interpretation of the stage battle, showing it as a battle of words, with the single combat as an argument between two people. An example of the word duel is found in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* where Fiddler parries Bowdler, word for word. There is another example, in *Phoenix*, II, 3 where the symbolism of dueling is carried to such a point that the angry disputants are specified as sparring with "the long sword or the writ of delay; the back sword or scandal; sword and dagger or the writ of execution; the rapier or the attorney; the dagger or the clerk."

In *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, IV, 1, the ignorant pedant, Sir Boniface, and Sencer, who is disguised as a pedant, argue for the hand of Gratiana. Sencer in his struggle to win Gratiana em-

ploys a series of tricks, including the ostentatious use of a language unknown to everyone (including himself). He says, "Kartere Moosotropos Poluphiltate phile poetatis tes Logikes retoon ouch elashiste sophoon. That is to say in our mutera lingua, I will make you Sir Boniface, confess yourself an ass in English." As has been noted, Sencer performs this traditional feat, and his conquest over Sir Boniface is final when he makes him say that his "nose was husband to a queen." This statement is made when Sencer asks Sir Boniface, "Who was Pasiphe's husband Queen of Crete?" The gullible pedant at once replies, "Who knows not that, why Minos was her husband."

All word-battles are terminated by the delivery of a judgment either handed down by a formal court or given as the pronouncement of a person of dignity, responsibility, and impartiality. This interesting convention of a play's conclusion by a judgment scene is discussed further in the next chapter.

#### ADVICE TO THE ELIZABETHAN PLAYWRIGHT

The first and most important counsel to be given an Elizabethan playwright on the subject of action is that he give his drama an abundance of it. He need feel no classic reluctance in presenting violent scenes on the stage, for they are acceptable to an Elizabethan audience. He should choose whatever action is effective for his theme and his characters should interpret it accordingly with the grace of romance, the bitter sting of satire, or the pathos of realism.

As for particulars in the construction of the author's plot, certain conventional tools should be pointed out to him, implements which, with different shaping, serve either as toys for comedy or weapons for tragedy. As a method of setting the plot in motion, the device of the "lie" should be remembered, also the device of bribery, by which means a character can gain admittance to a lady's chamber, purchase pleasure from a merchant's wife, buy intelligence from a servant, or, if the urgency of the situation demands, employ someone to destroy an enemy.

"Disguise" is another dependable device with which to set a

plot in motion: the lover pretending to be a music master, the amorous maid counterfeiting a page, the lout impersonating a "wench," and the lecherous old man duped into the guise of a fishwife. Various comic, tragic, and satiric situations are inherent in these beginnings, such as mistaken identities, deceptive rendezvous, ridiculous affronteries, even disastrous slaughters through ignorance.

If at this point the action seems to be moving with sufficient dispatch toward the climax, the author may wish to insert an interlude of comic relief or a stock scene of tragic pathos.

If, on the other hand, the action seems to be losing its momentum, the author should feel free to avail himself of one of the several convenient methods of reviving it. He should have a letter delivered disclosing fresh tidings, or have a long-lost friend appear with news, or simply have an important character utter a revealing soliloquy. The Elizabethan author can be confident that his audience will not quibble about these details, it only demands that the plot be kept in motion, constantly rising toward the explosion of the climax. After this decisive moment has been reached, the author must be prepared to give his play an appropriate and effective denouement.





## CHAPTER VI

# End

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### *The Judgment Scene, Argument; Deus ex Machina*

**I**t is customary for Elizabethan plays to end abruptly, affording time for only a hasty unraveling of the several plots. The denouement is usually based upon one of the climax scenes discussed in the last chapter, that is: the discovery, the trick, the revival, the judgment, or the battle to the finish. The final judgment scene, though one might suppose it to be a stock conclusion for a morality, is not so familiar a denouement of the early Tudor theatre as it is of the classic theatre. The third part of the only extant trilogy, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, ends with a realistic presentation of the trial of Orestes by the Athenian court. A familiar interpretation of the final judgment scene in classic drama is that which shows the argument or battle of words between two characters, while a third acts as an umpire or judge. The judge, after having listened impartially to both contestants, decides in favor of one against the other, as in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, *Knights*, and *Clouds*. Another popular device for rendering judgment is one in which the sentence is rendered abruptly, at a crucial moment of the

action, by an irrefutable judge. This device of the Deus ex Machina was used with such regularity and casualness by Euripides that he was ridiculed for it in his own time, and the practice in general has been disparaged by later eras as a confession of weak plotting. The device, however, had a sound psychological basis in Greek drama. The ways of the gods were accepted as being both unpredictable and inscrutable, and their miraculous appearances and speedy, arbitrary, and final decrees were accepted without question. Hercules "appears from above" to deliver the final judgment in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*; Thetis "hovers in mid-air" to straighten out the complications of Euripides' *Andromache*; Athene appears and gives the final decrees in his *Suppliants* and in *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Ion*; the Dioscuri perform the same service in *Helen* and *Electra*; and Apollo in *Orestes*.

The Elizabethan interpretation of the Deus ex Machina judgment is recognized in the scene where the King or Duke or country squire enters suddenly and unexpectedly. Though these characters do not appear as literally from thin air, they judge and decree with the same dispatch and omnipotence as the classic gods.

It is interesting to note in many early moralities that, though God's final judgment of man is the logical denouement, the action stops short of this scene. The omission was perhaps due to certain inherent difficulties in staging the scene, or perhaps it was considered more efficacious to let the audience depart in a state of suspense. The customary conclusion of the last scene is the repentance of the stricken hero; Freewill and Imagination in *Hickscorner* (1513-1516), and *Youth* (1520) and *Lusty Juventus* (c. 1550). The character responsible for the hero's fall is traditionally the devil or vice, often aided by other devils or vices. All such demons are conventionally beaten or "purged" off the stage at the end of the play. The reformed hero, once free from their influence, gives a pious protestation of his rediscovered faith. The custom of final repentance remains in the more sophisticated forms of Elizabethan drama and is usually observed even by villainous characters. When wicked persons are about to die, or when they hear their

sentence of punishment, they conventionally give instructive farewells, pointing out their evil example as a warning to others. One of the distinctive marks of homiletic dramas is the pious speech stating explicitly, but too late, the sinner's change of heart. Eleazar, Ganelon, Hoffman, Iago, and Mendoza stand out as hopelessly unregenerate characters in that they do not finally repent their crimes.

Many early Elizabethan plays end with a judgment scene, like *Appius and Virginia* (1559-1567), where the magistrates, Justice and Reward (names indicative of the semi-morality character of the play) sentence Appius to death and give Haphazard, the vice, a rope with which to hang himself. The magistrates condemn the traitor Claudius to "hanging on a tree," but when Virginius re-enters and pleads to have the sentence softened to banishment, the request is granted. The reconsidered and lightened sentence, as a result of an appeal for mercy as opposed to justice, is frequently found in judgment scenes. In *Appius and Virginia* the trial is followed by a funeral procession (also a stock scene from classic times), during the course of which Memory writes "indelibly" on Virginia's tomb and "all gather round to sing."

The concluding scene in *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* (1567-1568) combines elements of allegory and realism, as does the denouement of *The Three Ladies of London* (1581), in which Judge Nemo, the Clerk, and Crier enter. The Crier "sounds three times" and the defendants are lead to the bar. Lucre is arraigned for compulsion and is defiant. Conscience is charged with collusion and pleads guilty. Judge Nemo condemns Lucre to hell; and when Love is brought forth and "confounded by Conscience" she pleads guilty and is condemned to "pining," while Conscience is sent to prison to await the "day of general sessions."

The considerably earlier play, the comedy of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1553), is concluded with the more realistic type of courtroom scene in which the Bailey straightens out the misunderstandings between Dame Chat and Gammer Gurton, declaring Diccon

“a false knave” for mercilessly fabricating the grounds for their disagreement. The Bailey imposes sentence on Diccon and makes him take an oath on Hodge’s “breech” to reform. This well-motivated business brings about the final and surprising discovery of the needle in Hodge’s posterior.

Several of the plays in the 1600-1605 period conclude with realistic trial scenes. Some employ an even more dramatic variation, that of the execution scene, or, what better describes the majority of these endings in which the scaffold is shown on stage or described as being just off stage, the near-execution scene. This action occurs in *The Royal King*, *The Fair Maid of Bristow*, and *The Dutch Courterzan*. The only play under consideration in which the deed of execution actually takes place is *Sir Thomas Wyatt*.

Torture, banishment, or enforced marriage are the common sentences of the court, just as they are the usual penalties inflicted by the omniscient character fulfilling the function of the Deus ex Machina. Often the penalty of banishment is explained on ethical grounds, as in the case of Medice in *Gentleman Usher*. The Duke sentences this villainous hypocrite to banishment rather than death, because, he says, Medice’s “soul’s too foul to expiate with death.” Medice is condemned to “live like a monster loathed of all the world.” This same ethical reservation prompts Phoenix to banish the evil Lord Proditor rather than doom him to death. Phoenix feels that this traitor’s life is “too bad a life to end.” Marston, in the final scene of *The Malcontent*, has the Duke make the satiric statement concerning Mendoza that he is too low to merit the distinction of punishment by death. “Hence with this man,” the Duke shouts, “an eagle takes not flies.” Often the character thus scorned by society is beaten off the stage, in the manner that the vice character is driven from the moralities. Pogio, for instance, assures the audience in *Gentleman Usher* that he “will get boys and bait [Medice] out of court.”

It was inevitable that the scene of the “purge of vice” should be subjected to humorous experiment. A literary interpretation of the action is found in *The Poetaster*, where Crispinus, after having been

forced to swallow an efficacious pill, vomits up his anti-Horatian thoughts and words. The business of this scene has a possible relationship to the action in *Satiromastix*, I, 2, where Demetrius and Crispinus come to Horace "like your physician to purge your sick and dangerous mind." Jonson perhaps found the possibilities of the suggested device worth elaboration.

Other authors believed it merited attention, for variants of the purge scene are to be found in several plays, the most superfluous use being the anticlimactic horseplay about Tangle in the finale of *Phoenix*.

### *The Discovery Scene, Miraculous Cures and Revivals*

The discovery scene, the device most frequently used for the denouement in the classic theatre, continues to be popular in Elizabethan plays, though its treatment differs considerably: the discovery is less apt to result from a startling report or an agonizing self-revelation than from some stage action such as a trial, a battle, or a single combat.

In Greek tragedy the most common discovery scene is the one in which the character himself suddenly realizes his identity and the horrible deeds which he has unknowingly committed, as Oedipus suddenly realizes his dual relationship to Jocasta; or Hercules, waking from his madness, sees that he has slain his wife and children; or Agave who, shocked out of her religious transport, is made to realize that the "lion's head" which she proudly carries in her hand is in reality the head of her own son whom she has slain. A variation of the awakening to discovery is the willful withholding of knowledge by one character until another has committed a fresh crime. It is too late when Phaedra reveals to Theseus that her accusation of Hippolytus is false. And Thyestes long feels the chill of unknown dread before he is told that he has eaten his sons' bones as meat and drunk their blood as wine.

The concluding scene in Sophocles' *Electra* is a gruesome discovery trick. Aegisthus enters and Electra gives him "a joyous greeting beyond [her] wont." Her conversation is filled with double entendre as she gives credence to the rumor that Orestes has been killed in the wreck of his chariot. Suddenly, the central doors of the palace are thrown open and a shrouded corpse is revealed. Aegisthus walks to the bier and lifts the face cloth with a high heart, but to his horror he discovers the body of Clytemnestra instead of that of Orestes. Simultaneously, Orestes, very much alive, and Pylades, spring forward and drive Aegisthus into the palace, to be killed in the same way that Agamemnon has been, Orestes crying, "I will not spare thee any bitterness of death."

The outcome of all the extant comedies of Plautus hinges on the discovery scene, resolved in the case of *Amphitryon* by divine explanation, though the more frequent method is by the combined evidence of a tale and tokens, as in *Captivi*, *Cistellaria*, *Epidicus*, *Poenulus*, *Rudens*, and *Curculio*. The last, for example, concludes by showing the Captain, who is pursuing an unwilling harp girl, halted in his quest by the revelation that she is his sister. The harp girl is able, as is customary, to give her mother's name and her nurse's. She recalls how the latter took her as a small child to the festival of Dionysus where the seats collapsed and a man snatched her away. She wore a ring when she was lost, and when she shows this to the Captain, he at once recognizes it as the ring he gave to his long-lost sister for her birthday. The Captain embraces the harp girl, and giving her the joyous knowledge that she is a free-born citizen, he relinquishes her to the arms of her lover.

In the celebrated *Menaechmi* the final scene runs according to the conventional routine. When the two like gentlemen come face to face at last, they both claim to have the same name and both claim to have come from Syracuse. The slave of Menaechmus II counsels his master to question the double who confronts him, in the hope that he may be a long-lost brother. Menaechmus I says the earliest thing that he can remember was going to the market in Tarentum with his father and being lost in the crowd, but he is afraid there can

be nothing further in the story because his brother was named Sosicles. Menaechmus II at once exclaims that this was his name, but he was called by his brother's name after his brother was lost. Menaechmus I, excitedly, and as final evidence, gives his mother's name, and he is received into his brother's arms.

By the time of Terence the business of the discovery scene had become hackneyed to a point that it often occurred off stage as in *Eunuchus*, *Phormio*, and *Hecyra*, soliciting only a brief mention on stage. An expected corollary to the revelation of identity on stage, was the granting of a reward to the slave who had assisted in the disclosure of truth. The slave's reward was frequently the granting of his freedom.

It is interesting to note that the discovery scene is rarely employed in a morality, but this is to be expected since the central theme of a morality is of sterner stuff than the fantasies arising from a man's mistaken identity. Even in the interlude of *Jack Juggler* (1553-1558), which is stated to be an interpretation of the Amphitryon story, the author apparently felt no compulsion to give the obligatory scene which would be the discovery of the twins. This scene is omitted and the play ends with the identity of Jenkin wholly unsubstantiated. This poor, abused, stupid servant is left soliloquizing upon the fashion of the time to delude poor innocents "by some craft and subtilty or else by plain tyranny." In *Mucedorus* (1588-1598), however, the Plautine type of romantic discovery is employed, the same type of scene which later became popular in such plays as *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, *The Four Prentices*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Thracian Wonder*.

The discovery scene, though not a common denouement for Elizabethan tragedy, is frequent in comedy and is usually followed by a happy reunion and the bestowal of generous rewards for those of good faith. It is more apt to resemble the Roman rather than the Greek prototype, and it is almost always connected with the device of disguise.

The surprising revival of a character thought to be dead or the reappearance in perfect physical condition of a character believed to

be hopelessly maimed or disfigured are closely related to the discovery scene. The story of rebirth has captured men's imagination in all eras, the miracle of new life, the coming of spring on the earth after the death of winter, and the whole wonder and mystery of reproduction. There have been legends about these phenomena since the beginning of literature, expressive of man's deep longing for life after death—the story of Proserpine, of Eurydice, and the play of *Alcestis*.

The rebirth occurring in many of the early Church plays is based upon the resurrection of Christ, a miracle affording the greatest hope that has ever been offered to men with belief. The sudden reform of the sinner in Elizabethan plays is nowadays greeted with mental reservations; repentance, resolve, and emergence into a new and Christ-like life follow in such rapid succession that minds trained to reason and not to accept on faith find the conversion hard to believe. But instantaneous reform at any moment before death was an accepted and important dramatic convention in the sixteenth century.

A more sophisticated and romantic version of the scene of rebirth is found in the revival or miraculous healing of a character, like the curing of a heroine who has been subjected to the hideous "poisoning of the face" described in the last chapter. On her departure she is "spotted like a panther," and in the last scene she is led on, heavily veiled. Meanwhile, her lover has remained faithful, despite her tragic loss of looks. His constancy is rewarded, for when the veil is lifted from the heroine's face, she appears, according to convention, as beautiful as ever, cured off stage by the customary "juice of herbs."

A variant of this device occurs in *Measure for Measure*, where in the last scene a character "enters muffled." Angelo has ordered Claudio's execution and this command has apparently been carried out. But when the character throws off his disguise and reveals that he is Claudio, he is given a second and lighter sentence, the punishment of matrimony.

The revival of characters who have been seen in all the semi-

blance of death is a device commonly employed at any phase of the action, often in the final scene to effect a happy ending. The revivals of good Mistress Arthur and of the patient Countess save their husbands from the penalty of death as their murderers. The revival of Celestine in *Satiromastix*, though it may come as a surprise to some of the less suspecting members of the audience, is so routine as to be easily predictable by anyone with a theatre sense.

It is usual, as has been said, for good characters, suffering from madness, to recover in the final scene of a comedy. Likewise, if characters are believed to be fatally wounded, it is customary for them to be healed. Innocent victims, left on the stage for dead, often return in the denouement, having been nursed back to health by the secret and tender care of a friend; or sometimes they are cured by a more remote control, like the pious thought transference of Strozzi's devout wife in *Gentleman Usher*.

A convention to be remembered, in comparing classic and Elizabethan plays, is that, with few exceptions, classic characters who are dead, remain dead; but in Elizabethan drama a "corpse" even after the funeral has, percentage-wise, a considerable chance for revival.

### *The Trick Scene*

Revivals and the sudden revelation of truth as well as the discovery of identity are predictable surprises, but there are other surprise scenes which are extremely difficult to anticipate because they are based upon willfully contrived tricks. The quality of "guile" (destined to be associated with the Greeks forever) was often used to effect such a trick in dramatic action. One thinks of the murder-trick, and sees Agamemnon being lured into a "strangling robe"; or one sees Sophocles' Electra leading her unsuspecting mother to her death in the palace; one sees Euripides' Electra tricking her mother into entering the hut; and one sees Hecuba enticing Polyester and his unfortunate children into her tent with a false promise of gold.

In Aristophanes' comedy of *The Knights*, his aggressive Sausage

Seller finally triumphs over the tyrant Cleon, not only by faster talking but also by a sleight-of-hand trick with a rabbit. In *The Thesmophoriazusae* the character of Euripides employs every trick in his bag of dramatic art in an attempt to free his abused father-in-law, and he finally succeeds, not with one of his own, but with the best-known trick in the world.

In Elizabethan tragedy a ruse is frequently employed in the denouement, one of the scenes most frequently shows a woman as "a trap" to catch a man, as in *Hoffman* and *Bussy d'Ambois*. There is also the ruse of poison, which is shown in *The Noble Soldier* and in *Hamlet* but, as has been remarked earlier, the poison plot usually produces a double-barreled surprise, since death rarely comes to those for whom it is intended.

In *The Spanish Tragedy* Thomas Kyd shows a revenge trick which had profound influence on dramatic scenes thereafter, that is, the device of the play within a play. Jeronimo has determined to manipulate his revenge by producing a play enacted by the culprits themselves. He says that he has written a tragedy of Soliman and Perseda, and with Bel Imperia as his conspirator, he hands out the roles as he sees fit. He plays the murderer himself, and in character, kills Lorenzo who plays the part of Erastus, while Bel Imperia, as Perseda, stabs Balthazar who is impersonating Soliman. Bel Imperia thereafter kills herself, though Jeronimo did not call for this action in his script. What is left of the denouement after the play-within-the-play is not anticlimactic, for when the gruesome trick is discovered and Jeronimo is seized, he bites out his tongue, stabs Castile, and then himself.

Possibly the interest aroused in this play-within-a-play inspired a detailed study of the story of Soliman and Perseda, for a full-length play bearing that title appeared soon thereafter. The denouement of this tragedy is equally bloodthirsty and combines the death tricks of disguise and poison. After Erastus, Perseda's lover, has been falsely tried and strangled, and after Perseda has stabbed to death her attendant Lucina for any possible part she may have had in the affair, she dresses as a man and comes forth on the ramparts

to accept Soliman's challenge to single combat. They fight and he stabs her. As she lies dying, he unmasks what he believes is his male opponent, and cries out in anguish when he recognizes the woman he loves: "What, my Perseda! All that I have done! Yet kiss me, gentle love, before you die." Perseda feebly replies as she expires, "A kiss I grant thee, though I hate thee deadly." He kisses her long and lingeringly, and when Bascillisco, a vainglorious knight, pushes forth to kiss her too, Soliman slays him for his presumption. Soliman also slays Perseda's little page, Piston, so that he may continue to "wait on her through eternal night." Soliman leans over Perseda's corpse and sees a "paper" clenched in her teeth. He reads the message which reveals the final trick: "Tyrant, my lips were sauced with deadly poison to plague your heart that is so full of poison." Instantly, Soliman realizes that he is dying too. In the throes of death, he makes the sentimental and inconsiderate request to be buried in the same tomb with Perseda and her lover Erastus. After uttering a pious repentance, a page-long death speech, Soliman expires on Perseda's body.

In Elizabethan comedy, trick endings conventionally come as a surprise to almost all the characters concerned and to the audience, as in the finding of Gammer Gurton's needle or the miraculous reappearance of the diamonds in *Westward Ho!* A growing interest is noticeable in tag-end surprises which are not closely related to the plot but are entertaining episodes in themselves, such as the trick Pippo plays in the last scene of *What You Will* when he disguises as a Merchant's Wife, or the solution to La Busse's riddle which is enacted in the last scene of *Charlemagne*. The desire on the part of the author in using these scraps is manifestly to startle and to delight the audience. An exaggerated example of the superfluous but amusing trick conclusion is found in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*, where, after Phyllis has fulfilled the demands of the denouement, a character never seen before, a Master Wood, enters and insists that Phyllis' father be arrested for a diamond that he has stolen from him. This diamond has not been seen nor mentioned since Act I when a suspicious character named Bobbington gave it

to Master Flower as security for a ten-pound loan. This rude interruption and insistence that Flower be brought to immediate trial breaks the romantic current of the play and turns everyone's thoughts from the Church to the Hall of Justice. The final rhyming couplet of Master Flower stresses this satiric turn of events, he urges all his friends to accompany him off stage to assist him at the trial. This irrelevant but entertaining incident recalled from an early scene of the play is more suggestive of twentieth century technique, which never neglects a detail and which delights in such pranks, than it is of the Elizabethan method, which selects only what it chooses from a sprawling and Gargantuan body of material.

### *Death on and off Stage*

One of the distinctive features of Elizabethan tragedy is the conclusion, not with one murder but with a holocaust of blood. These deaths, devised by various terrible and ingenious means, are frequently shown upon the stage in realistic detail and in contrast to classic tradition. In regard to the classic conventions governing the treatment of death, it should be understood that while the classic theatre demurred at showing murder, it did not hesitate to present suicide, as witness Sophocles' Ajax, Euripides' Evadne, Seneca's Phaedra and Jocasta, action which an Elizabethan would have viewed with uneasiness. As has been said, the sixteenth century playwright was accustomed to showing characters contemplating suicide, in grief, or in remorse, but few were allowed to perpetrate the deed.

In Greek and Roman tragedy, death resulting from battle or single combat is conventionally not shown but is either "reported" or "revealed." According to the first practice, after the chorus' final strophe and antistrophe, an informant or messenger enters with woeful mien and relates the "fresh ills" which have befallen the house. After this report, the body of the important victim is borne on to the stage. The convention of the funeral procession, as mentioned, is common, being used in Aeschylus' *Seven Against*

*Thebes*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, Euripides' *Andromache*, *Suppliants*, *Trojan Women*, *Electra*, and *The Phoenissae*. The other, more realistic method of "revealing" death to the spectators is effected by throwing open the central doors of the palace or the entrance to the hut and showing the body soon after the murder has been committed, often with the murderer still standing over the corpse with blood-smeared hands; thus, Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, who is revealed standing over the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, and avenging Orestes, who is seen in the second part of this trilogy standing over the corpses of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, a sword in one hand and the "strangling robe" in the other. Such sights lack only the horror of the moment of murder itself.

This moment, although it is commonly thought of as being off stage in Greek tragedy, is in many cases barely off stage, for though the murder is not performed within sight it is often performed within calling distance. One clearly hears the victim's shrieks from the palace or tent or hut, as the chorus helplessly wrings its hands. "Listen, listen! who is screaming in mortal agony?" the Leader cries out in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*; and, in Sophocles' *Electra*, "I heard, ah me, sounds dire to hear and shuddered." This latter play, as noted, ends dramatically just before the murder of Aegisthus, as Orestes and Pylades drive him into the palace to his death. Euripides uses the device of barely off-stage murder in *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Hercules*, and *Electra*. In *Orestes* all goes according to routine until Helen, partly immortal, thwarts Orestes' purpose by "vanishing."

There are a few classic characters who actually die on the stage: Euripides' Hippolytus, though not felled on the stage, is carried on and dies; and in Euripides' version of *Medea*, though Medea kills her children within the house, she later appears carrying their corpses. Seneca's Medea slays one son in *V*, 1, and, carrying his body to the rooftop, she forces her other son to follow; and in the next scene, despite the agonized pleas of Jason, she murders this second boy in full view of the audience, an action that would have been deplored by Horace.

It is a natural step in the metamorphosis of the treatment of "scenes of blood" that the Elizabethan, while he freely used the old conventions of "report" and "revelation," should be interested in developing the suggestions into spectacular scenes. A case in point is the arraignment of Sisamnes in the early tragedy of *Cambyses* (1558-1570). Sisamnes is a counselor whom King Cambyses has appointed to rule during his absence, but whom now, upon his return, he arraigns for his mismanagement. Sisamnes' son vainly pleads for him. The King remains adamant and Sisamnes, according to the directions, is "smote in the neck to signify his death." Cambyses then orders Sisamnes' skin to be pulled over his ears to make his death more vile, and this hideous sight, it is indicated in the text, is made possible on the stage by peeling off "a false skin." Directly following this scene, Sisamnes' son (whom Cambyses has made the new advisor) urges the King to desist from the vice of drink. This counsel so enrages Cambyses that he calls for his critic's child, and draining a glass or two, says he will defy the charge by his accuracy in piercing the child's heart with an arrow. This new scene of horror is enacted, and the accuracy of the King's marksmanship is proven. Cambyses orders the child's body carried off and his bleeding heart is presented to his father.

In the final scene of *Tancred and Gismunda* (1591) this same gruesome token of a human heart is brought to the heroine in a cup. The bearer delivers it to her with these cryptic words from Tancred, her jealous and incestuous father: "The thing to joy and comfort thee withall, which thou lovedst best, even as thou wast content." She knows at once that the bleeding heart is her lover's, and that her father has slain him. She takes the heart in her hand and weeping, kisses it. She throws off her jewels and lets down her hair. She fills the same cup with poison and drinks it, and lies down to die. Tancred rushes in, and realizing what she has done, goes mad with grief. He pulls out his eyes, like Oedipus, stabs himself and falls upon her body. The confused classic and morality elements in this tragedy are apparent and in the epilogue, the Lord Cham-

berlain tries to reconcile the two currents by urging this far-fetched moral:

Such are the fruits of too much love and care

• • •

Now humbly pray we that our English dames  
May never lead their loves into mistrust  
But that their honors may avoid the shames  
That follow such as live in wanton lust.

In the tragedies of the period 1600-1605, certain conventions are apparent in the use of violent action. In such tragedies of classic imitation as *Alaham* and *Sejanus*, a certain amount of classic restraint is noted. For instance, the Old King and his helpless daughter Celica are driven off stage to their death by Alaham's hired assassins rather than being butchered on the stage. The author, however, confidently presents (on the authority of Seneca's *Medea*) a finale of violence. Alaham burns to death in a magic robe and Hala, his villainous wife, is shown killing one child, and though the last lines are fragmentary, she probably kills the other child, like Medea.

In *Sejanus*, the death of Drusus by poison is punctiliously reported in Act II. In the denouement, the hideous mutilation of Sejanus is reported, with the added intelligence of the fatal atrocities performed upon Sejanus' children, characters unmentioned until this moment. The only death which occurs on the stage in this tragedy is that of Silius, a minor character, who, when the counsel Varro accuses him in Act III of protracting the wars, ~~stab~~ himself in an approved classic manner, but without adding significance to the plot.

Other tragedies which are not swayed by classic authority show little restraint in the depiction of death on the stage. There are conventional scenes, such as death resulting from a particular engagement, a tournament, a duel, a battle, or single combat. These are deaths of honor, illustrations of which are most notable in warring

history plays. One finds several fatal encounters of this nature in *Jeronimo I*, where, in the famous war between Spain and Portugal, certain valorous moments are depicted, and many important characters pair off and eliminate each other.

There is also murder as an act of passion, such as Ganelon's stabbing of Richard in *Charlemagne*; the more popular variant is the murder of a man by the hired assassins of his enemy, as is the fate of Bussy d'Ambois. There is also butchery through ignorance, as in the case of Mathias who, acting on a lie of Hoffman, kills his brother. In the same play, Lazarotto, the tool of Lorenzo, kills the man he has been hired to kill, but in so doing, slays in disguise the man whose cause he has been employed to aid. Iago is another who makes a mistake and kills his own tool in the darkness.

This type of mistaken murder, it can be seen, is closely allied to the murder plot, which conventionally goes afoul. Jerome in *Hoffman* is urged to participate in a murder scheme to further his own ends, but the outcome results in his father's death as well as his own. The King's plot to murder Hamlet with a poisoned rapier is not successful until after the King and his conspirator, Laertes, have perished by the same weapon and the Queen has drunk from the poisoned cup which was held in reserve for Hamlet in case he did not fall by the sword.

If the murder of an important character should by chance be successful, it is often followed by minor murders. A villain frequently kills his tool "so he won't blab," as Hoffman kills Lorrique and Lorenzo kills Lazarotto in *Jeronimo I*.

In tragedy, death increases the hero's stature, makes his cause the more piteous, and impels the sympathy of the audience as the curtain falls. Conversely, death is too sweet an end for villains like Hoffman, Iago, Ganelon, and Didier; such unrepenting devils are customarily deprived of the privilege and are last seen being led off to "the tortures."

## *Last Lines and Epilogues*

It is interesting now to consider, according to the record of theatre history, the details of endings, the nature of last lines, and the presence or absence of epilogues. The substance of the last speech of a Greek tragedy is usually some variation of how cruel and uncertain are the ways of the gods. An agonized victim cries, "Behold the sufferings I endure as the Fates decreed!" This plaint is often chanted by the chorus as in Aeschylus' *Persians*, *Seven against Thebes*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides*. It may also be given by a character, as in *Prometheus Bound* where it is delivered by the hero. In *Agamemnon* the final speech is given by Clytemnestra, whose mood of triumphant defiance clearly marks the play as the first part of a trilogy. All Sophocles' tragedies end with the chorus chanting, except *The Trachiniae*, in which Hyllus chants the six concluding lines. They are filled with the familiar content, that "No man foresees the future; but the present is fraught with mourning for us and with shame for the powers above, and verily anguish beyond compare for him who endures this doom." All Euripides' tragedies end with the chorus chanting the usual complaint that the ways of the gods are strange and unlooked for. In three of his plays, however, an interesting phenomenon occurs. In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Orestes*, and *The Phoenissae* the final lines have nothing to do with the play; they are a prayer for the author's victory in the dramatic contest. In *Orestes*, after Apollo and Helen "vanish," the chorus suddenly chants, "Hail! Majestic Victory, still in thy keeping hold my life and ne'er withhold the crown!" and almost identical words conclude the other two plays.

In Aristophanes' comedies the last line is sometimes given to the leader of the chorus, as in *The Frogs* and *The Thesmophoriazusae* (in the latter the hope is expressed that "the two goddesses reward us for our labors!"). Sometimes an important character speaks the last line, like Demos in *The Knights*, who, after being "warmed over" again and given new hope, installs the Sausage Seller as the new tyrant of Athens; and Trygaeus, the pacifist in *Peace*, gives the

joyous and familiar call, "Oh Hymen! Oh Hymenaeus!" as he invites all his friends to come away and eat wedding cakes galore.

It is interesting to note that Roman comedy, which is devoid of a chorus, ends often with a speech by the title character or by the witty slave. The latter, a man of all work, becomes an important character in Roman comedy, and in many cases his machinations are all that give movement to the plot. Plautus' earlier plays, *Asinaria*, *Bacchides*, *Captivi*, *Casina*, *Cistellaria*, and *Epidicus* all have epilogues, the gist of each being a plea for applause. This may be simply expressed as in *Asinaria*, where it is urged, "Now, if you would save the old man from a beating, plead his cause. And he cannot fail to win it, if you give him your applause." In *Cistellaria* it is said: "And now for the rest that remains for you spectators; in the fashion of your forebears, give us your applause at the conclusion of the play." In *Casina* the plea is more complicated and more humorously conceived: "Now it's only fair that you should give us plenty of well-deserved applause with your hands. Whoever does this will always have the harlot he wishes without his wife's knowledge; but the man that doesn't clap his hands as loud as possible will get in place of a harlot—a goat soused in bilge water." The later plays of Plautus are without specified epilogues, though in each, without fail, the last line contains some version of the same message of farewell and a request for applause.

In Terence's comedies there are no epilogues set apart as such, but the later custom of Plautus, the salutation and plea in the final speech, is perfunctorily observed in each play. A character like the slave, Parmeno, in *Hecyra* says with brevity: "I'm coming. (To audience) Well, I've done more good today unknowingly than I ever did before. Now give me your applause."

Seneca's plays are remarkable for the brevity of their entire fifth act and for their universal lack of an epilogue or any form of plea for applause. The last speech of only one play, *Hercules on Oeta*, is delivered by the chorus; in all the others it is given by one of the major characters, usually in the form of a woeful lament.

Turning from late Roman drama to early English drama, the

sixteenth century moralities and interludes are found to have their distinctive pattern of conclusion. It is in a wholly different mood. The plight of the victim is shown as the result of his own waywardness and his punishment is a warning to all men to avoid his errors and to follow instead, the example of Christ. The piece conventionally concludes with a pious homily delivered by one of the characters, in rhymed couplet, with words of simple meaning. *Everyman* (1495-1500) concludes with the Doctor pointing out to the spectators that all but Good Deeds desert Everyman when he dies. The last words have the familiar ring of Christian optimism: "And he that hath his account whole and sound, High in Heaven will be crowned . . . Amen." In *Calisto and Melibaea* (1526-1529) the latter's father delivers to her a two-page sermon on the virtues and vices of pretty maids, concluding with, "the world continually shall be brought to naught, As long as young people be evil up-brought." He asks Eternal God to "send his merciful grace and influence" to bring youth true virtue and obedience. The stage directions of many early plays indicate that the final action was in the form of a prayer. During this the characters knelt, and after the formal "Amen," all rose and marched off.

As one studies the denouements chronologically, one finds that the secular element tends to become emphasized in the terminal prayer. A blessing for the Queen, the Council, the Nobility, and the Commonwealth becomes a stock request. An even more personal plea is made for the audience in John Heywood's *The Four PP* (1520-1522), when the Palmer pleads in the last lines that the audience be given grace:

To pass the time in this without offense  
Was the cause why the maker did make it  
And so we humbly beseech you to take it  
Beseeching our Lord to prosper you all  
In the faith of his Church Universal.

This lighter touch is also seen in *Thersites* (1537), in which the knight, Miles, gives the concluding prayer a free interpretation:

Love God and fear Him, and after Him your King  
 Who is as victorious as any is living  
 Pray for his grace with heart that doth not feign  
 That long he may rule without grief or pain.  
 Beseech ye also that God may save his Queen  
 Lovely Lady Jane and the Prince that he hath sent them between  
 To augment their joy and the Common's felicity  
 Fare ye well, sweet audience, God grant you all prosperity  
 Amen

The last speech of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1552-1563), delivered by Diccon, abandons the prayer form altogether and returns to the typical Roman farewell:

Soft, sirs, take us with you, the company shall be the more  
 As proud comes behind they say, as any goes before  
 But no, my good masters, since we must be gone  
 And leave you behind us here all alone  
 Since at our last ending thus merry we be  
 For Gammer Gurton's needle's sake, let us have a plaudite.

By 1580 epilogues are frequently employed, and in such a play as Nash's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592-1593) one sees how ingeniously this form has been developed. The epilogue is here expanded into a scene per se, as a tiny boy comes forward and sits upon Will Summer's knee. The boy delivers a long and comic prose epilogue, prompted at intervals by Will. When the boy has concluded his speech, Will picks him up and carries him off stage, saying to the audience as he does so: "Valete spectatores: pay for this sport with a plaudite and the next time the wind blows from this corner we will make you ten times as merry."

The epilogue in *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington* (1598) offers the audience the following inducement to give the play a kind reception:

Well-judging hearers, for a while suspend  
 Your censures of this play's unfinished end  
 And Skelton promises for this offense  
 The second part shall presently be penned.

There follows a brief résumé of the action of the intended sequel which the character of Skelton promises will soon be forthcoming:

Take but my word, and if I foul in this  
Then let my pains be baffled with a hiss.

The promised play, *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington*, was produced in the same year, and its epilogue is chiefly concerned with the author's solicitude for the audience.

By 1600 the epilogue is conspicuous as an author's toy: concern that the audience will remember the play's moral is entirely subordinate to the concern that the audience will remember the author with kindness. This is typically Plautine, as is the form, which is conventionally short, ingratiating, and witty. The author's plea is often couched in flattering and persuasive terms, embroidered with some pretty figure of speech like comparing the play to a feast, which the author hopes will please the taste of his spectators' understanding.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes they are inveigled into a game which inevitably involves the action on their part of clapping hands.

Dekker and Marston ingeniously ask for applause in the epilogue of *Satiromastix* by having the epilogist, Captain Tucca, beg his hearers to be his friends and not hiss the play so that Jonson will not be provoked to answer. "Make me a bell," he suggests, "and clap, make a lusty peal this cold winter." Whether there were hisses or not we do not know, but Jonson of course replied.

It is interesting to consider Jonson's epilogues for a moment as they are the most brilliant as well as the most irregular ones of the period. In *Cynthia's Revels*, Epilogus defends the author's dramatic ability and method with this famous protest:

To crave your favor with a begging knee  
Were to distrust the writer's faculty.  
To promise better at the next we bring  
Prologue's disgrace, commends not anything.  
Strictly to stand on this, and proudly approve  
The play might tax the maker of self-love

<sup>1</sup> Compare the similarity of the epilogues in Plautus' *Rudens* and the Anonymous *The Wit of a Woman*.

I'll only speak what I have heard him say;  
By (—) 'tis good and if you lik't, you may.

Jonson continues his personal battles the following year with the two angry prologues and the epilogue to the "Comical Satire" of *The Poetaster*. The last is an epilogue scene in which three characters participate, including the Author who defends his method of writing. Jonson tells the folio reader in a note which immediately precedes the epilogue that "the apologetical dialogue" was "only once spoken upon the stage and all the answer I ever gave to sundry impotent libels then cast out (and some yet remaining) against me." The epilogue character of the Author defends himself for the fact that it takes him almost a year to bring forth a play (a slowness which apparently served as a constant source of amusement to Jonson's prolific contemporaries). The Author insists that the mastery of his completed performance vindicates him from censure, and vows that he will waste no more time "in contemned strifes with these vile Ibides, these unclean birds." He adds determinedly:

. . . I leave the monsters  
To their own fate. And since the Comic Muse  
Hath proven so ominous to me I will try  
If Tragedy have a more kind aspect.  
Her favors in my next I will pursue  
Where if I prove the pleasure but of one  
So he be judicious, he shall b'alone  
A Theatre unto me.

*Sejanus*, produced two years later, is Jonson's attempt at courting the "Tragic Muse." It bears no defensive prologue nor epilogue, doubtless out of deference to classic convention. But with or without protest, and despite his exalted hopes, the Tragic Muse proved to be even more ominous to Jonson than the Comic Muse. His spirit and his confidence seem to have been shaken by the cold reception of *Sejanus*, for in his next venture, after a lapse of two years, one finds an interesting change in technique. In *Volpone* (1605) Jonson considers his audience's desires first and his own second. He

makes a conscious effort to please. The epilogue illustrates this change of tone. It is delivered by the Fox and shows a lack of concern for the author which is no less surprising than is its ingratiating concern for the audience:

The seasoning of a play is the applause  
Now, though the Fox be punished by the laws  
He, yet, doth hope there is no suffering due  
For any fact which he hath done 'gainst you  
If there be, censure him: here he doubtful stands,  
If not, fare jovially, and clap your hands.

*Epicoene* (1609) and *The Alchemist* (1610) have no epilogues, but *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616), and *The Staple of the News* (1625) all court applause in the conventionally bright-but-humble fashion that was soothing and pleasing to an audience. The epilogue to *The Devil Is an Ass* is even graciously self-derogatory:

Thus, the Projector, here, is over-thrown  
But I have now a Project of mine own  
If it may pass: that no man would invite  
The Poet from us, to sup forth tonight  
If the play please, if it unpleasant be  
We do presume that no man will, nor we.

The epilogue in *The Staple of the News* is in the form of a sonnet, and its politely deferential rhymes, when placed beside the bristling protests of *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster*, give visible proof of the author's metamorphosis. The whole story of Jonson's bitter strife in the London theatre is clearly revealed by a chronological inspection of his prologues and epilogues. Early, he takes exception to the rule of brevity as well as to the rule of courtesy. He is right and the world is wrong. He will pound sense into his spectators, no matter if they dislike it, and if it takes all day. A one-man crusade in the theatre is a losing battle; any man with dramatic instinct could have told him this at the start. He himself admits defeat after the failure of *Sejanus*. Thereafter, Jonson tries his best to con-

form. He does not even presume, after 1603, to call his pieces "Satires," he simply calls them "Comedies." Bitter and disillusioned, he desists from creating his own rules and tries to follow the established formulae for gaining applause.

In contrast to Jonson's use of the epilogue, it is interesting to note Shakespeare's avoidance of it. Only a few of his plays have epilogues. In two, the form is highly conventional. In *All's Well* the King pleads:

The King's a Beggar now the Play is done  
 All is well ended, if his suit be won  
 That you express content, which we will pay  
 With strife to please you, day exceeding day:  
 Ours be your patience then, and yours our parts  
 Your gentle hands lend us and take our hearts.

The epilogue in *Henry V* employs another usual device by having the chorus state that:

Thus far with rough and all-unable pen  
 Our bending Author hath perused the story  
 And pleads acceptance.

In *Henry IV*, Part II, a low comedy prose epilogue is used, full of puns, parentheses and "legs." It is a speech obviously contrived for delivery by Master Kemp:

First, my fear; then, my curtsie; last, my speech. My fear is your displeasure; my curtsie, my duty; and my speech to beg your pardons. If you look for a good speech now, you undo me: for what I have to say is of mine own making, and what (indeed) I should say, will (I doubt) prove mine own marring . . .

If my tongue cannot entreat you to acquit me, will you command me to use my legs? And yet that were but light payment to dance out of your debt: but a good conscience will make any possible satisfaction, and so will I. All the Gentlewomen here have forgotten me: if the Gentlewomen will not, then the Gentlemen do not agree with the Gentlewomen which was never before seen in such an assembly.

One word more, I beseech you: if you be not too much cloyed with

fat meat, our humble Author will continue the story (with Sir John in it) and make you merry with fair Katherine of France: where (for anything I know) Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions: for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man. My tongue is weary, when my legs are too, I will bid you goodnight; and so kneel down before you: (but indeed) to pray for the Queen.

In *As You Like It* (1599) Shakespeare employs a character as epilogist who is to become the favorite apologist of the eighteenth century, the gracious heroine who pleads the author's cause. Shakespeare has his boyish Rosalind beguile her spectators with:

"It is not the fashion to see the Lady the Epilogue: but it is no more un-handsome than to see the Lord the Prologue. If it be true, that 'good Wine needs no bush' 'tis true that a good Play needs no Epilogue. Yet to good Wine they do use good bushes; and good Plays prove the better by the help of a good Epilogue. What a case am I in then that am neither a good Epilogue, nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good Play? I am not furnished like a Beggar: therefore to beg will not become me. My way is to conjure you; and I'll begin with the Women. I charge you (oh Women) for the love you bear to Men to like as much of this Play as pleases you; and I charge you (oh Men) for the love you bear to Women (as I perceive by your simpering none of you hates them), that between you and the Women, the Play may please. If I were a Woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, and breaths that I defied not. And I am sure, as many as have good beards, or good faces or sweet breaths, will for my kind offer when I make curtsie, bid me farewell."

It is obvious from these few illustrations that Shakespeare could write epilogues as conventionally ingratiating, as humorous, and as facile as any other man in the theatre; but from his conspicuous restraint in employing them, despite Rosalind's stated opinion that "plays prove the better by the help of a good epilogue," he shows that he did not consider them of particular dramatic significance.

*Advice to the Elizabethan Playwright*

After considering the general conventions of denouement which have been under discussion, a critic is able to give an Elizabethan playwright certain helpful suggestions. He should perhaps begin with the heartening observation that Elizabethan spectators do not demand the logical ending associated with the dictum of Aristotle. Above all, Elizabethans want a play full of action, and for this medial sweep of movement are willing to accept many terminal infelicities. In fact, they are not averse to surprise, and welcome an ending of tricked expectancy such as Lope de Vega advocates. An Elizabethan playwright is not expected to dally over his denouement. All that is demanded of him after the climax is to solve the central problem, state the moral, and set the mood for the company's procession off the stage.

Certain stock scenes are handy tools which an author should feel free to employ in resolving his plot. One of the best to consider is the discovery scene. It has been, and always will be, one of the basic and best scenes in drama. Though an Elizabethan may not feel that a simple classic discovery scene affords a sufficiently spectacular climax for tragedy, he may well find it to his purpose in comedy. If he has indulged his main characters, earlier, in frequent disguises, he may indeed find it the only possible means of solving his plot.

An Elizabethan should appreciate the effectiveness of the denouement scene in which a trick or trap "discovers the truth." He should be familiar with many illustrations of the head-trick (which involves the substitution of heads or bodies) and of the bed-trick (the less gruesome substitution of maidens at assignations). He should also be familiar with the undoing of a criminal through such tricks as the woman trap, the revival, the mock play, and the mock tribunal.

If his play is a tragedy or a history, the best ending is probably the conventional fighting finish. This is composed of scenes of battle or of personal conflict, mounting to the final obligatory engagement, wherein right asserts its physical triumph over evil. In a

comedy he should consider the fashionable variation of this sequence, as translated into a symbolic encounter, that is, a battle of words in which the final assertion of right over wrong is given in a judgment scene. The most conventional way of rendering such judgment is to have a passing duke or a country squire serve as an omnipotent umpire, in the manner of the classic *Deus ex Machina*; or if the author wishes, he may show the verdict delivered by the general company assembled. If he wishes to be still more realistic, he may portray an actual court trial or an execution scene. A critic following the plays of 1600-1605 must admit that the climax of mock-conflict is an ascendant fashion in Elizabethan comedy, but an astute critic must add the warning that this particular practice is a danger signal for future generations who may pursue a symbolic interpretation to a point which will negate all dramatic action.

In the general matter of denouement, an Elizabethan should be counseled not to forget that his play, like any other artistic interpretation of life, should render poetic justice. His audience expects to see his evil characters given their proper punishments and his good characters their proper rewards. He should also remember, in the matter of rewards, that it is fashionable to promise as many betrothals in the end as the limited ratio of female to male parts allows.

The convention of giving the last speech to the actor of highest rank (in the case of tragedy the man of highest rank still left alive) is generally employed, though it is also permissible to give the last words to the character who, in the estimation of the author, has proven himself the audience's favorite. Whoever delivers the last speech should include a phrase or two specifically for the function of clearing the stage. This can easily be effected by having the speaker request either that the company march off to celebrate the merry conclusion of events, or that they join in the funeral procession to bury the dead, whichever the case may be.

There is probably no need to tell the Elizabethan playwright of 1605 that the mood of the finale has changed considerably with the passing years, and that the conventional prayer, which con-

cluded the early Elizabethan plays, is no longer fashionable. The terminal "Amen" should be dropped in word as well as spirit. If the author wishes to address certain distinguished spectators, perhaps the Monarch, he may be advised to place his salutation in the form of a gracious conceit, separated from the action, in an epilogue.

As to whether or not a playwright employs an epilogue, apart from this purpose, he should be counseled to regard, on one hand, Shakespeare's neglect of the form, and on the other hand, his contemporaries' enthusiasm for it. The admission must be made that despite the Bard's usual omission of one, the fashion of the day called for an epilogue, one which conventionally had no connection with the play other than as an entreaty for its kind reception. Since the counselor has somewhat prophetic powers, he should perhaps hint that Shakespeare's practice is more sound dramatically. He might even predict that after the fad of the epilogue has run its course (through the inevitable pleas of Beaumont and Fletcher and all the witty and talkative playwrights of the Restoration) the practice of Shakespeare's unbroken thread of realism, unburdened by extraneous tag ends, would become a firmly established practice.





## *CHAPTER VII*

# Conventions

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### *Constant Principles, Changing Conventions*

**I**T is assumed at this point that the aspiring playwright asks for a recapitulation of the most important rules to guide him in writing a successful Elizabethan play. Above all else, he should be told that the best study is his contemporary theatre, for this theatre represents the dramaturgy of his era, the reaffirmation of constant principles and the record of changing conventions. The principles he must grasp instinctively, the conventions he must examine. In doing this, he will discover that many of the fashions of his theatre are adaptations of those employed in classic, *Commedia*, and medieval drama.

The transformation is apparent, of the classic rustic into the Devonshire farmer or the gull from Essex, or the fop from France. The latter two frequently have marks of other classic figures about them, such as the braggart, the coward, or the parasite. The witty slave and the dull slave appear again and again in the guise of Tudor servants, and in some plays these "boys" are employed in such numbers that they overrun the stage. The classic nurse metamorphoses into the lady's maid, a figure of bright possibilities. The

classic courtezan becomes a realistic interpretation of a celebrated London courtezan or a "private harlot" like a merchant's wife. Many gallants assume the qualities of the swashbuckling Commedia captain, and many fathers have the marks of a miserly and licentious Pantalone. The morality devil becomes the Machiavellian temptor; and the prodigal, the rake. The satiric interpretation of lawyers, doctors, and pedants grows increasingly popular, and to this gallery of portraits are added the unflattering likenesses of priests and parsons. Certain essentially English types emerge as pleasing and successful characters—the merchant (either sharp or dull) and the simple, honest tradesman, the merry man with good horse sense. Perhaps, as a representative of the pit, it was the tradesman's duty to appear in every play, at any rate his presence becomes as inevitable as that of the clown.

The hero of early Elizabethan romance develops from a blunt warrior into a witty rake and, as if to keep in step with him, his patient and colorless heroine turns into a witty and willful maid, not averse to deception. Not infrequently the classic hero of a tragedy of revenge metamorphoses into a villain of melodrama. In many cases he is assisted in his crimes by a villainess even more heartless than himself. Sometimes these evil characters are foreigners, but at other times they are derived from the annals of English history, familiar personalities who sometimes come daringly close to being contemporary.

In contrast to the classic practice, Elizabethan plays customarily begin at the beginning of the story which they are to tell. Though sometimes the exposition is given by a dumb show or an expository prologue, the initial scene more often begins unheralded, the necessary facts being given quickly, either by means of a soliloquy or of a dialogue scene. Realistic dialogue is conspicuous as the form which gains in favor during the period.

As for the "middle" of an Elizabethan play, there are certain qualities to be noted. Plots conventionally strive for fast, daring action. There is a premium upon variety and invention and a noticeable delight in surprise. An Elizabethan is not concerned with

conflicting, nor even omitted, details but with a cumulative effect. Unlike a classic author he is eager to show on the stage all the action that is possible.

The premise of tragic action in English drama is based, not as in Greek drama, upon the persecution of a victim by the cruel gods, but upon a man's willful self-destruction. The Elizabethan hero is shown striving for a goal by every means of brain and brawn, including the sudden assault, the planned duel, the lie, the trick, and the bribe. One can expect these stock devices just as one can anticipate the scenes which they inspire, among them, the hiring of an assassin, the administration of poison or potion, the death scene, the mad scene, the tomb scene and the revival from death. Other scenes which are typically Elizabethan, though they are prompted not so much by themes of action as by distinctive features of the sixteenth century stage, include the balcony scene, the battlement or rampart scene, the trap-door scene (in which this entrance is used as an opening to hell or a secret passage to a lady's chamber), and the inner stage scene (portraying a cave, hut, or house, or a space within, such as a bedroom).

One of the pleasing qualities about the action in Elizabethan plays is its lively self-revelation, scenes of local color, in the hunting field, at the card table, along the Exchange, at Newgate, the stews. Often mention is given of a celebrated figure of the day, of a famous discovery, a social outrage or a new fad.

Elizabethan comedy customarily concludes by vindicating the worthy and laughing at the foolish, whereupon the whole company is invited off stage to celebrate. The denouement of satire follows the morality pattern, with the character of the Vice beaten off the stage, while the good characters receive their just rewards. Tragedy conventionally ends in bloodletting, a more copious purge than that associated with the classic tradition. And though after this distinction it may seem paradoxical, in opposition to classic tragedy, which ends on a note of frustration, Elizabethan tragedy ends on a note of hope, a final, even if fatal, triumph of good over evil.

All these variations and innovations upon earlier method re-

sult in a mixture of elements so essentially Elizabethan that no dramatic critic could mistake an Elizabethan play for one of another era.<sup>1</sup>

### *Conventions Puzzling to the Twentieth Century*

An examination of the differences between sixteenth and eighteenth century dramatic technique holds considerable interest, but an examination of the differences between sixteenth and twentieth century technique is essential if a critic of the latter period is to make a final appraisal of the Elizabethan theatre. He must thoughtfully consider the many sixteenth century conventions which are still generally understood; he must distinguish them from the ones which are accepted with self-consciousness and embarrassment or a smile of superiority. He must also recognize the conventions which in his time appear to be so baffling to contemporary actors, producers, and readers that they preclude any enjoyment of a piece.

A twentieth century critic admits a predominance of pleasing conventions in Elizabethan drama. The few jarring, dated practices which break the essential enchantment of theatre make-believe have, in intervening centuries, been "cut" or "corrected." For three centuries Shakespearean productions have been assiduously adapted by way of "correction." What is remarkable is that in such interpretations so much of the Poet's original spirit remains.

While the twentieth century is generally much more receptive of Elizabethan conventions than was the eighteenth, it nevertheless finds several of them disturbing. Because they represent the salient differences between the dramaturgies of the two periods, these conventions deserve special comment. Those most difficult of acceptance by present-day critics are the frequent lack of motivation, the inconsistencies in characterization, and the omission of promised action and requisite scenes. These, and other differences in tech-

<sup>1</sup> For further development of this subject and a detailed comparison between sixteenth and eighteenth century dramatic technique, as demonstrated by the forged play, *Vortigern*, a purported Shakespearean tragedy, see Mary Crapo Hyde, "Shakespeare Jr." in *To Dr. R.*, Philadelphia, 1946.

nique, will be discussed in detail, but the general explanation is that Elizabethans treated action on a large scale, giving only passing notice to details, while twentieth century playwrights have been trained to believe that the smallest action deserves minute attention.

#### LACK OF MOTIVATION

Motivation is a twentieth century obsession. A present-day audience expects elaborate rationalization before each action; it will wait with patience and interest to see that the necessary explanations are forthcoming and will feel cheated if they are omitted. It is willing to accept the fact that Medice in *Gentleman Usher* desires to kill Strozza, if given sufficient reason why Medice's hatred of Strozza inspires this desire. However, Chapman never reveals this basic information, which has the effect of rendering the deed unacceptable to a modern reader. The same lack of explanation of basic motivation renders unsatisfactory the conclusion of the feud between the families of Infelice and Hippolito in *The Honest Whore*. While a twentieth century observer is willing to accept the original premise of the feud's existence, it is not willing to accept its happy termination without benefit of explanation.

Some of the most puzzling action in this respect concerns the hasty and unmotivated deterioration of a character, without any development of the emotional conflict or the psychological tortures that may be supposed to precede the downfall. For example, Vallenger and Fontinelle are presented to the audience as conventional lover-gallants; but at the first temptation they degenerate into conventional débauchés, and, in the concluding action, as quickly and unbelievably revert to their original status. The chief reason why this rapid show of temptation, fall, and reform did not disturb an Elizabethan is that he was familiar with the morality pattern and accepted its conventions of character change and action as commonplaces.

The tragic fall of Mistress Frankford is a case in point. While the lack of psychological explanation for her temptation and sin are disappointing to a modern playgoer, these omissions were expected

by the Elizabethan. A homiletic play was not supposed to make sin attractive by a realistic portrayal of temptation. It was not supposed to dwell upon the mental and emotional torment, but to reserve the expression of anguish for the long concluding cries of remorse. Joylessly and quickly Mistress Frankford surrenders herself to Wendiff and, precluding what we consider complications and dramatic situations fraught with suspense, she simply says:

That which for want of wit I granted erst  
 I now must yield through fear; come, come, let's in  
 Once over shoes, we are straight o'er head in sin.<sup>2</sup>

The length of the speeches given over to the lament for the sin she has committed are in striking contrast to the brevity of her speeches in the contemplation of sin.

An example of a character whose violent deeds are conspicuously lacking in motivation is Hoffman. Unlike the other hero of revenge, Hamlet, whose actions are soundly motivated, Hoffman, from the start, stands on unsound ground psychologically. The murder of Hoffman's father, the revenge of which is the basis of the plot, is never adequately explained to justify the corollary murders or to render the title character sympathetic. That Chettle is disturbed by the fact that his hero has become a heartless villain is manifest in the denouement, where he attempts to dignify Hoffman's motives. The attempt is futile and the author's discomfort is revealed by his inability to render Hoffman a final punishment.

Other important characters in the same play lack psychological explanation for their violent actions. Myopic Lorrique deserts the employ of his good lord, Otho, to become his betrayer, after listening to no more of a plea than is provided by the author in the following lines:

*Hoffman:* Wouldst thou having lost a father as I have  
 . . . Wouldst not be revenged?

*Lorrique:* Yes, on the murderer.

*Hoffman:* On him, or any man that is allied

<sup>2</sup> Heywood, *A Woman Kilde with Kindness*, F<sub>4</sub> verso.

Has but one ounce of blood of which he's part  
 He was my father, my heart still bleeds.  
 Nor can my wounds be stopped till an incision  
 I've made to bury my dead father in:  
 Therefore without protraction, sighing or excuses  
 Swear to be true, to aid, assist me, not to stir  
 Or contradict me in my enterprise  
 I shall now undertake, or hereafter.

*Lorrique: I swear.<sup>3</sup>*

This oath is taken before any money or other enticement is offered. Possibly even Chettle felt the motivation weak, for he has Lorrique explain that the reason for his acquiescence is his sheer love of villainy.

Typical of the general lack of motivation in the action of Hoffmann is another incident occurring later in the play. Duke Frederick, in IV, 1, calls unexpectedly for wine. A word or two could have made the command seem a natural desire and several lines would have greatly heightened the suspense, for the audience is aware of the fact that the wine has been poisoned by Jerom and, though this moronic prince intends the goblet for one other than his father, any spectator with a sense of stage convention, knows that the Duke is doomed.

#### INCONSISTENCY OF CHARACTERIZATION

A distinctive quality of Elizabethan plays is their prodigal use of characters. This is appealing to a twentieth century observer, but he complains that often in the cavalcade of dramatis personae minor characters remain undeveloped or unfulfilled and many major characters suffer in their depiction from a lack of personal elaboration.

In *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, Kate, the maltreated fiancée, and later the bride of villainous Young Plainsey has possibilities of developing into not only a character of rightful importance, but one of pathetic significance. However, after Kate's

<sup>3</sup> Chettle, *Hoffman*, sig. B2.

appearance in Act II, she is peremptorily dispatched from the action without even the minimum consideration of a mad scene. In Act IV Young Plainsey makes a declaration of love to Bess, the heroine, with a casual reference to Kate's demise, which leaves one ignorant as to whether Young Plainsey abetted his wife's death as he earlier indicated that he would. He says merely:

Commend me to [Bess], Stroud, since my wife  
Hath given her latest farewell to the world  
Tell [Bess] I do intend to marry her.

Another lady who is ephemeral to the play's detriment is Gratiana in Chapman's *All Fools*. She is secretly married to the young gallant Valerio and, as has been said before, the substance of the story is the business of keeping their marriage secret but at the same time allowing them to live under the same roof in order to enjoy it. It is indicated that Gratiana is poor, a fact which would be expected to prejudice her mercenary father-in-law. She is said to be fair, which is an accepted convention, but from where she came, what her parentage, her personality, her humors are, where the two young people met, when and how they decided to marry, are natural questions which one must forego the pleasure of having answered. If these facts had been given and elaborated upon, *All Fools* would have been an excellent comedy according to twentieth century standards but, as it is, a modern critic feels that the play is based upon a good idea which dies at the end of the first act, starved from lack of complication.

Wendoll, the lover, in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* suffers from a lack of characterization, both in the matter of background and of personality. Among the few distinguishing attributes given to Wendoll are, that he is "affable," "discoursing well," that he is "a good companion," and "though of small means yet a gentleman." When Master Frankford is first seen with Wendoll he takes him to his heart and commands him to use his house as freely as if it were his own. Master Frankford orders his servant Nicholas to treat this guest as he would his master. During the course of the

action in which Wendoll follows these instructions literally he appears more as an agent of evil than as a person. When Wendoll meets Mistress Frankford upon the road to her banishment it is said that she scorns him "like the devil." Wendoll has been likened to this individual by the intuitive Nicholas in Act II, and this diabolical impression seems to be one which the author wishes to leave with the audience, for Wendoll's last action resembles the shrewd type of the vice character, who runs from the scene rather than tarry to be beaten from it. Like such a character Wendoll hopes for a repetition of his crimes on fresh soil. He says he will "wander to France, Germany, Italy, learn the language and then try to have [his] parts recognized by some gentleman."

In two other plays, characters having considerable dramatic potentialities are introduced—the Duke of Alva, the Spanish General, in *The Alarum for London*, and the Duke of Guise in Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois*. A logical development of characterization would add strength to both plots, but these characters are discarded before they are allowed to become effective. Given the chance, the Duke of Guise would be an excellent foil for Bussy d'Ambois, but the enmity of the two men and the suspense it holds is lost when the responsibility for the downfall of Bussy d'Ambois is transferred from the hands of Guise to those of Tamyra.

The Duke of Alva, traditionally one of the leading characters in the siege of Antwerp, is given an impressive entrance and is well delineated through scene 5, where the chivalric side of his character is shown in contrast to his villainy. As Spanish soldiers strike at the Flemish Count, Egmont, the Duke of Alva hurls himself between them. In protecting Egmont, he is struck:

Thou seest me wounded, to preserve thy life  
I that was never pitiful before . . .  
    . . . prisoner thou shalt to Spain  
And there be entertained to thy deserts  
Now pity, pack from Alva's heart again  
    . . . now to the deserts fly  
For havoc, spoil and murder now I cry.

To show, even momentarily, the noble side of Alva makes his characterization interesting, but the pains expended seem unnecessary, for Egmont is never referred to again, and Alva becomes a shadowy figure himself, disappearing entirely after scene 11. To a twentieth century critic such treatment of a character presented with initial emphasis is reprehensible.

Although certain figures from British history appear in plays without benefit of extensive explanation, an Elizabethan audience was familiar with many of these characters, certainly with such recent historical figures as those portrayed in *Sir Thomas Wyatt*. To a later-day spectator, however, the delineation appears nebulous and puzzling. From all the information given in the text of the opening scene in which Northumberland and Suffolk talk of the dying King Edward VI in a room beyond, this monarch might be assumed to be an old man. This impression is not corrected until a casual reference to his youth is made five scenes later, long after his decease. The character of Queen Mary, also in the same play, is an interpretation without substance. She would not be recognizable to one who had not encountered her before, but in a sixteenth century play this was not a matter of concern, for any Elizabethan would be able to fill in the painful details of her career.

In fairness to the Elizabethans, it should be said that, though it is now fashionable to be primarily interested in characterization, in their era the emphasis lay in the direction of plot and action. It is the nature of plays of action to introduce numerous characters and to develop only a few, according to the survival of the fittest. The problem of survival in the Elizabethan theatre was increased by the exigencies of casting which often demanded that a character disappear in order to allow the actor impersonating him to assume a different role.

#### CHARACTERS OUT OF CONTROL

Every playwright faces the problem of keeping his characters in line with the original conception of their parts. He also faces the problem of keeping them in the right proportion of importance, one

to another. This frequently proves difficult because after certain characters have been created they grow with such independence that they begin to speak and to act in defiance of the author's plan. Often their waywardness appears to amuse the author at first, and he does not try to curb their freedom until it is too late.

The personality of Duke Lodowick of France, the hero of *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* changes basically from scene 8 to scene 16. During the course of these scenes, Lodowick is shorn of his aristocratic stature and becomes a character of low comedy. His fleeing with his "two precious jewels," his wife, Oriana, and their daughter Diana, accompanied by the faithful Barnabe Bunch, is a travesty on scenes of flight. Lodowick's easy farewell to his "precious jewels," whom he leaves behind as security for a rent bill he owes a Flemish scoundrel, can hardly meet the British standards of sporting conduct, even for one of lowly rank, which the Duke of Bullen assuredly is not.

*Lodowick:* I think that thou and I must part.

*Oriana:* Why must we part?

*Jacob:* Ich must de gelt heb . . .

At this point, Barnabe endeavors to pay the bill to Jacob, but after bringing out his money, guilder by guilder, thereby creating considerable suspense, he finds that he lacks one guilder.

*Lodowick:* . . . I will leave

My dearest, most valued jewels here.

Friend Bunch, farewell, be kind unto these twain.

And if I live I'll recompense thy pain.

• • •

I will cross the narrow seas for England

To London . . .

*Oriana:* Farewell, farewell.

*Diana:* Farewell, dear Father.

*Lodowick:* My sweet girl, adieu

He bless us all that keeps both me and you.

(Exit.)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, sig. D2 verso and D3.

Directly attributable to the waywardness of Lodowick are necessary changes effected in the character of Mercury, the Duke of Anjou, who is first shown as the villain, the opponent of Lodowick and the person responsible for driving him from France. However, while Lodowick is wandering comically and ineffectually abroad, a mighty foe strikes at France, in the person of Don Hernando of Spain. It is necessary that someone defend France against the invader, and in default of any other leader, Mercury is given this distinction in scene 5. How the author later reestablishes Mercury as the villain and maintains the defense of France without benefit of either Duke is a feat explained later in this chapter.

Attention is now turned to another independent character in *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, the vicar, Sir Nicholas, who is introduced into the play in scene 8 by the demands of the plot. The scene is Ards, in Picardy, and Lodowick enters "fainting." As Sir Nicholas appears, the tattered Duke begs from him in Latin phrases —business which affords humor, as well as an opportunity for the familiar assertion of the superiority of the mother tongue. Sir Nicholas insists that Lodowick resort to this fairer form of speech, and when he does, Sir Nicholas finds him of sufficient worth to merit the position of parish sexton, a post which stands open at the moment. Lodowick accepts with gratitude, and his further decline from an aristocratic state is shown by his performance of the sexton's lowly services. Sir Nicholas was introduced into the play for the purpose of this scene with Lodowick, but it is apparent that as an invention he became so entertaining that it was hard to banish him from the action and impossible to control him within it. Sir Nicholas' characterization becomes increasingly rude. His stiff parlance, in blank verse, during his first scene with Lodowick, is reduced to such lines as these in scene 15:

. . . Fare ye well, fare ye well  
I come i' faith lad, I come though I be late  
I come to lie as near the mistress as any of ye.

Two scenes later, when asked by Odillia if he will write a letter for her to Lodowick, doggerel and rough prose are the extent of his

resources. "To tell you true, lady," he says, "a letter of six lines is a three days' work for me." He reveals his true interest after Odillia departs:

*Nicholas*: Now tell me Bunch, where is the best licker?

*Bunch*: At the Green Dragon, gentle master Vicar.

*Nicholas*: Will the dragon sting?

*Bunch*: From the head to the heel

He will sting your brain so that he'll make your feet reel.

*Nicholas*: Let's go play for two pots, away, Bunch, away.

*Bunch*: Then the parish is like to have no service today.

The dissolution of Sir Nicholas can be traced in the markings of his name in the text. In scene 8 he is referred to as "Sir Nicholas," later as "Sir Nic" and "S. NI." In scene 12 he is respectively called "Nicho" and "Nich." In scenes 15 and 17, he is simply designated as "Ni."

The Marshal of Spain, Jeronimo, in the play of that name, is another character whose dignity diminishes as the action progresses. By scene 10, the reduced stature of this hero accounts for the introduction of a new character, "The Lord General of Spain," who is obliged to assume Jeronimo's place as the State's military leader, in the conflict which is imminent. A half-hearted effort is made in the concluding action to reinvest the character of Jeronimo with dignity. The little Marshal is shown on the battlefield, speaking bravely, in the unfamiliar cadence of blank verse; but it is too late to reendow his personality with nobility. "Little Jeronimo" has become a comedy character in this rewriting of an old tragedy, and it is in this guise that he is permitted to have the last words with the audience, to beg their applause, and to "bid all goodbye."

#### LATE AND SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF CHARACTERS

The necessity of having the Lord General of Spain appear shortly before the conclusion of *Jeronimo* in order to resolve the complications of the plot, seems, to present-day readers, a careless lack of planning on the author's part. Epernoune, the Lord General of France appears in the same unexpected manner in the last

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scenes of *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*. In this play the difficulties provoking Epernoune's entrance have been explained: the wanderlust of the hero, Lodowick, and the danger of allowing the villain, Mercury, to attract sympathy for long by his assumption of heroic responsibility. In scene 13 Epernoune is mentioned for the first time and he enters shortly thereafter. He is able, in the remaining action of the play, to develop more personality than such clumsy henchmen of the author are wont to. Perhaps Epernoune is aided in this by a pronounced tenderness of nature and also by a physical handicap which at once commands the attention and sympathy of the audience. He is too crippled to walk and is carried on stage in a litter. He conducts the trial of Ferdinand, for whom he has conceived an intuitive affection, in a state at first bordering upon and then unrestrainedly in tears. There is both pathos and humor in this business of the old General weeping between words. As the play's climax is reached, where it is "proven" that Ferdinand is Frederick, Lodowick's son, and therefore freed of the death sentence, Epernoune's tears turn to tears of joy, and with a gesture of generosity and love, the childless old man makes Frederick and Odillia, his wife, the heirs to his vast estate.

In Daniel's play of *Philotas* several characters make unexpected appearances and disappearances. In Act IV, scene 2, Belon, who is not on the contemporary list of characters, is introduced to deliver essential encouragement and support to Philotas. In Act IV, scene 1, two new characters, Attaras and Sostratus, are introduced for the purpose of talking about what happened "last night" after Philotas went home, in this fashion posting the audience upon events up to the moment of immediate action. In Act V, scene 2, Polidamas, another citizen, is presented with the assignment of reporting further happenings. A Nuncius performs the same function in the play's finale, delivering a report on the progress of Philotas' torture, confession, and death.

Typical of these characters who are created from the necessities of late exposition is Master Chambers, who appears in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*. Challener is at the time in London, and it is es-

sential that he be informed about what is going on in Bristow. Solely for that reason, Master Chambers appears before Challener, who welcomes him to London and inquires the news of Bristow, which Master Chambers promptly delivers, to wit, that Vallenger on "Thursday next will espouse the beauteous Anabel." Having conveyed the information that Challener's friend has successfully replaced him in his mistress' affection, Master Chambers departs into oblivion.

In *Thomas Lord Cromwell* Masters Newton and Crosby appear but once, which is in Act IV, scene 3, and their presence serves the same purpose, in this case to convey the fact of Bishop Gardiner's animosity for Cromwell. In the last scene of this play Cromwell's son appears, a particularly late entrance considering the fact that neither he nor his mother has been mentioned before. No doubt the object of this stalwart youth's presence beside his father who is about to die is to give pathos to the conventional scene of moralistic farewell.

There is another common type of late appearance, like the Duke's sudden and unexpected entrance in the last scene of *Blurt Master Constable* and of King Richard's in *The Fair Maid of Bristow*. Both appear in answer to the call for a judge, someone who will resolve the difficulties of the plot, render a decision and dismiss the company. Such terminal appearances, as has been said, are an Elizabethan interpretation of the *Deus ex Machina*.

#### SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF CHARACTERS

Elizabethan characters, as well as making sudden and unprepared initial appearances, also have a proclivity toward disappearance from the action, either for a considerable time, or forever. The most flagrant example is the loss of the hero in *Alaham*. Mahomet Bassa represents the Christian Spirit, much needed in this play, as a foil to the heathen brutality of Alaham. But after Act II, scene 4, Mahomet disappears from the play. He has just met with his brother Cain and, when each confesses that he has been sent to kill the other, they determine to pretend that Mahomet has been slain.

They agree further that Mahomet will live in secret and bide his time till he can overthrow Alaham and bring back a just rule to the state. Unfortunately for the story, which sorely needs a hero to give a glimmer of hope in the end, Mahomet never returns.

The original villain of *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green* disappears after the first scene. Bedford is responsible for exiling Momford on a trumped-up charge, without allowing him to say a word in his own defense. After concluding his accusation, however, Bedford disappears from the action. No sufficient reason is given for his hatred of Momford, nor is sufficient explanation given of Sir Robert Westford and Young Plainsey's conspiracy with Bedford to bring about Momford's fall. In the last scene of the play the Duke of Gloucester casually tells King Henry VI that the accusations against Momford were false, but he does not elucidate further. The conventional device for the rehabilitation of Momford would have been to bring Bedford back in the last scene, have him confess to the forged letter, and have him given some punishment commensurate with the humiliations which Momford has suffered; but these rights of poetic justice are overlooked.

One of the puzzles in every production of *Twelfth Night* is the broken promise of Maria which is given to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in Act II, scene 3, "I will plant you two and let the fool make a third where (Malvolio) shall find the letter." In Act II, scene 5, all is set for the plot, but the directions read: "Enter Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian." Who is Fabian? He has never been mentioned before and indeed is never characterized throughout his following appearances. Fabian is without personality, so notably so, that certain directors have endeavored to individualize the character by clothing him as a gardener, or as a cook complete with cap and ladle. Fabian's sudden appearance, together with Feste's absence, is presumably accounted for by a physical difficulty in the original staging of the play. It is the fact that the character responsible for the part of Viola could not sing, despite the fact that she tells the Sea Captain in Act I, scene 2, while urging him to press for her employment with the Duke:

It may be worth thy pains for I can sing  
And speak to him in many sorts of music.

When in Act II, scene 4, Viola is called upon by the Duke for a song, she has to run for Feste. It was customary in almost every comedy to have a character whose voice could be depended upon, like a singing fool, a singing page, or a singing maid. It is unfortunate that the Fool, who could have given a substantial contribution to the letter scene, cannot be present, but it is expressly said that he is at the Duke's, while the scene takes place in Olivia's garden.

In *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* the first characters seen are Scarlet and Bobbington, two gallants who, hard-pressed for money, rob the Fair Maid and her companion, Ursala, as the two damsels cross "Mile-End-Green." Scarlet disappears from the play after this initial scene as does Ursala. Bobbington, however, reappears in scene 3, where, claiming that his name is Captain Racket, he urges Master Flower to loan him ten pounds, for which he offers a diamond ring as security. Flower makes the loan and puts the ring on his finger where it is visible to the audience throughout the action, though it is not mentioned again until the final trick scene, described in the last chapter. It would appear that the author originally intended to make further use of Scarlet, Bobbington, and Ursala, but possibly, after establishing the atmosphere of the Exchange, other characters assumed any plot responsibilities which might have been intrusted to these persons.

In the opening scene of *Patient Grissell*, Pavia, the elder brother of the Marquis, is given prominence, but apparently his services are not needed thereafter, for he disappears from the action until the last scene, when his presence is demanded as the escort of his brother's new bride.

Puff, who is used for comic effect in the serenade of fair Katherine in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, disappears after the first scene of Act II. Perhaps the author believed, by this time, that the comic possibilities of the character had been exhausted, or perhaps it was necessary for the actor playing the part of Puff to assume

another role. Be that as it may, at this point, Puff gives up his suit for Katherine's hand and departs precipitously for home, where, it is said, he will "fall to the law."

Real dramatic possibilities are sacrificed by the disappearance of Calisthenes and Antigona in *Philotas*. Calisthenes is Philotas' advisor, a friend he sorely needs, but he disappears after the initial scene. An even greater loss results from the removal of the heroine Antigona. Daniel's treatment of Antigona is niggardly, he gives her no love scene with Philotas. In two of the scenes in which she appears, she talks about him with Thais, the treacherous Greek courtesan whom Philotas formerly loved. In Antigona's remaining scene, she talks with Craterus, to whom Thais has revealed all the incriminating evidence about Philotas which has come through her conversations with the guileless Antigona. Thais, after performing this evil function, also disappears from the play without ever serving to develop the triangular dimensions of the plot, and without living up to the possibilities inherent in her part, for any complications inspired by Thais would have been interesting, even if accessory. Antigona's betrayal of her lover in Act II, scene 3, and her disappearance after this crucial moment is action which is difficult to accept. The opportunities of increasing the poignancy of Philotas' tragic situation would seem not to have been overlooked, but painstakingly avoided, with his fall being effected in the end by a treacherous surprise. In trying to make such an illogical conclusion acceptable, Daniel appears to drop as much sympathetic incident as possible. This is a dangerous course to follow and it is interesting that contemporary comment on the performance records that Daniel's arbitrary treatment was not successful, and that this unclear play was greeted with scant applause.

The surprising appearance of the unmentioned character of Charles, in Act III, scene 2, of *Hoffman*, a cousin of Jerome's who is confident that he will in time be "elected" Prince, is only surpassed by the surprise of his absence in IV, 1, at the time most auspicious for his "election." It is puzzling that Charles should be

allowed to disappear at the first moment in which he might have come in conflict with the other claimant for the crown, Hoffman; but possibly the author had at this point determined that the hero's fall should be wrought by a woman rather than by a man, by trickery rather than a conflict of right over wrong.

This apparent change in the natural course of the plot, the decision that a villain-hero's fall should be effected by a woman rather than by a man, would explain Mahomet's disappearance in *Alaham* and also the dismissal of the Duke of Guise in Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois*.

A character less actively involved in the plot than those considered, but a pleasing character nevertheless, is dropped from *Michaelmas Term*. The Country Wench's father first appears in Act II, scene 2, delivering a monologue which runs for more than a page. He reads a letter from his daughter which reports that she has run away to London to try her fortune there. He reads a word or two and then he vilifies that evil city where he himself once went to try his fortune but succeeded only in losing everything that he possessed. After expressing his righteous indignation, the old man makes the sudden determination to follow his daughter to London, in disguise. In Act III, scene 1, he comes to the Wench's lodgings, where the satiric comment is made that she is so convincingly attired as a gentlewoman that her father at first does not recognize her. The Country Wench also fails to recognize her father, whom she hires as her servant. Interesting possibilities are suggested in the end of this scene when the father soliloquizes upon the familiar sites of his early temptations. In Act IV, scene 2, he argues with the Wench to give over London and the life of a harlot, and, with this argument, which is unheeded, his service to the play seems to terminate. Though he appears briefly in the following scene, his presence contributes nothing to the action. No recognition scene ever takes place between father and daughter, no mention is made again of his personal resistance or fall to the temptations of the city, it is never said whether he returns to the country; in fact, no inkling

is given as to what happens to this old man in the end. It seems strange that he does not appear in V, 2, when Lethe is arrested for philandering with the Wench on his wedding day, and more particularly in V, 3, when Lethe is given the sentence of the Judge, which is to marry her. Possibly the Wench's father is absent because he is obliged to take the Judge's part. This necessity for an actor to play multiple roles, often as many as four or five in a play, undoubtedly accounts for more of the vagaries under consideration than any other factor.

#### METAMORPHOSIS OF PERSONALITY

A twentieth century audience does not approve of the unmotivated metamorphosis of a character during the course of a play's action. This phenomenon is common in Elizabethan drama, and one of its manifestations is the propensity to physical growth which provoked the satiric remark from Jonson in *Every Man In:*

To make a child, now swaddled, to proceed  
Man and then shoot up, in one beard and weed  
Past three score years . . .

Such a practice is well illustrated by the "infant" Sebastian in *The Noble Soldier*, who by Act V attains sufficient stature to assist in the denouement in the guise of a friar. Despite the gibes of Jonson and Sidney and others, the aging of characters during the course of action was an established dramatic convention. More criticism can be placed upon playwrights for their carelessness in failing to explain changes or development in a character's personality.

Mamon in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* undergoes a considerable transformation. In the first scene he gives the impression of a strait-laced, thrifty individual, rather than a lover of earthly pleasures. He criticizes the lavishness of his host's entertainment and he upbraids his page by saying, "Cannot you come where heady liquor is, but you must booze?" At the end of the scene, though he dotes on Katherine, he decides altruistically that he had better be

gone: "My presence hated, therefore Mamon, down. Farewell, Sir Edward." No one in Act I refers to Mamon's age; in fact there is no hint of his being old, a fact which is harped upon from Act II on. In this Second Act Mamon develops into a thoroughly evil character. He hires Monsieur John to kill Pasquill, Katherine's lover, and when he finds his victim supposedly dead, he stamps up and down on his "body" crying, "Snakes, toads and earwigs make thy skull their nest."

Often disappointing lapses in characterization occur. Interesting and conspicuous traits or abilities which are stressed in a way that arouse curiosity are left unexplored. This is true of Shakespeare's Helena in *All's Well*. After the first scenes she fails to make use of what is perhaps her most distinctive characteristic, her power of healing. It seems a neglected dramatic opportunity never to employ, in the later complications of the plot, her medical genius which was originally so effective.

Sometimes a character's relationship or feeling for another changes without apparent reason. Phyllis, the Fair Maid of the Exchange is shown during most of the action as infatuated with the merry Cripple of Fanchurch. She makes ardent love to the Cripple, but it appears that the good-natured man has "lent his shape" to the ingenious Frank Golding. When Frank casts off his disguise, the Fair Maid makes no attempt to find the real object of her protestation. She does not again assert her love for the Cripple nor does she explain why she thus forsakes him. In the remaining action she bestows her hand upon whatever Golding brother answers her "riddle." The Cripple, is left at the play's end, standing on the stage without a line to support him.

One feels that such discrepancies of characterization are attributable more to the playwrights' haste and lack of care than to any willful intention to defy the precept that a character should remain consistent in his interpretation, a principle forcefully expressed by Aristotle, upheld by Horace, and respected by all critics who have followed.

## OMISSION OF ANTICIPATED SCENES AND OBLIGATORY SCENES

Playgoers have always been quick to follow the signposts ingeniously provided for them, and when certain situations are suggested they anticipate at once the amusing or tragic scene which should ensue. Elizabethan authors are sometimes negligent in carrying through these *scènes à faire*. In *The Family of Love*, for instance, Gerardine disguises as a porter and carries a trunk on stage which he ambiguously says contains all of "Gerardine's corporal substance." Dr. Glister, who is trying to protect his ward from this suitor's advances, is glad to have anybody's "substance," and he remunerates the porter for carrying the trunk to his ward's bed-chamber. One does not expect Dr. Glister to remain on stage long enough to see the porter climb into the trunk, but one does expect that either the doctor or some other character will at some time witness Gerardine's emergence to enjoy his love. The scene of Gerardine's appearance from the trunk is doubly disappointing, for no characters contribute to the suspense of his discovery, and Maria, herself, greets him without reaction. No dramatic situation ever arises out of the trick of the trunk, no one suspects that a person is hiding in it, no one lifts it, or tests it or is in any way concerned with it. When in Act III, scene 4, Gerardine announces to Maria that he is removing the trunk, no one, including the audience, is interested, since no suspense has been created concerning it.

The treatment of the trunk is disappointing, in that the amusing possibilities are never developed. This business is however, not action of basic importance to the plot. When the omitted action is an obligatory scene, a real injustice is done to the audience. For instance, the absence of any love scene between Tamyra and Bussy d'Ambois is disappointing, but the omission of the obligatory scene of the discovery of Tamyra's guilt, is, in twentieth century opinion, a technical fault of the play. The scene should come at the moment when Montsurrey asks to see the pearls which he recently gave to his wife, a request Tamyra is unable to grant since she has given the pearls to Bussy d'Ambois. Montsurrey should rage, accusing Tamyra

angrily but without final proof, until Bussy enters wearing them. The incriminating pearls are carefully planted by the author early in the action, but they are lost in negligent fashion and are never mentioned after Act III, scene 1.

In *The Honest Whore*, the climax of one of the plots, the revival of Infelice and her reunion with her lover (in other words the stock tomb scene), is not shown. The happy events are merely reported by Dr. Benedict. Thus, when Infelice and Hippolito enter hand in hand, the drama of their story is over and the details which are shown on the stage are uninteresting and foregone conclusions. The insistence upon the performance of obligatory scenes is not merely a convention of our day but a principle of dramaturgy.

#### FAULTY PSYCHOLOGY

One of the most difficult sixteenth century conventions for a modern reader to accept is the erratic treatment of psychology in plays. Our insistence upon psychological justification for every act is likely to become a fetish which later generations will ridicule, but, be that as it may, the present-day concern with the study of human behavior renders offensive those Elizabethan characters who lack foresight or curiosity and who, without thought, are provoked to violent action. It seems to be an established custom that a sixteenth century character believes any given statement instantly and without question. If, a moment later, he is told the direct opposite, he accommodatingly changes his mind and accepts the second statement as readily as the first. This quick turnabout does not disturb him, and he is rarely obsessed by worry; he seldom plumbs the depths for even the obvious, much less the obscure, truth. What twentieth century playwright would dare to have Mathias believe, without a moment's reflection, the cock-and-bull story of the faithful Lucybell's fleeing with a passing Greek? Or what playwright would dare to let the clever Planet believe that the presentation of Brabant Jr's "coat and hat" was sufficient proof that this enemy had been slain? Who would dare paint Hernando, Prince of Spain,

so lacking in curiosity and judgment that he would employ a total stranger to assassinate the French General?

Most Elizabethan characters who give vent to introspection are the victims of conscience or remorse, and their repentance, which comes after the crime has been committed, is dictated by the morality tradition. Today the convention is quite different: prolonged mental agony prior to action, and little emphasis on terminal remorse.

Shakespeare, either unconsciously or in defiance of the Elizabethan custom, shows great interest in portraying the torment of the human mind before action is taken. Of all the sixteenth century dramatists he makes these struggles the most emotionally appealing; often the mental conflict possesses reality and pathos equal to the physical conflict predicated upon it. Shakespeare's approach is a direct rejection of the homiletic tradition that it was dangerous to make the desire to sin attractive. Shakespeare's compassion for his characters made him treat them understandingly, sympathetically, tenderly, and in this approach, now called psychological, he is in tune with the present century.

Our emphasis upon the psychological explanation of action is the basis of most of our lack of understanding of the Elizabethan theatre. Sudden and unprovoked changes of emotion disturb us. The merry suggestion, as a character stands over the freshly slain corpse of a close relative, that he will drown his grief "with a little music" or "a song" or "a little sleep" seems incredible and robs the scene of reality. The instantaneous and arbitrary decisions to love or stop loving, to hate, to kill, to spare, as well as the sudden inspiration to reform are puzzling, if one is used to a realistic interpretation of such matters. Quick, unmotivated change seems not only devoid of reason but also a waste of dramatic material.

To the Elizabethan, however, motivation was not considered the paramount virtue of playwriting technique. Abundant and ingenious action was the essential quality, and as long as the plot maintained its momentum the audience was expected to be satisfied. Authors and spectators accepted the rules of the "opposite state"

without insisting upon the minute explanation of every progressive movement in the swing of the pendulum: the change from good to evil, from love to hate, the turning from gentleness to shrewishness, the rising from helplessness and poverty to riches and power, and the fall back to nothingness . . . in fine, the gamut of life, of strength and weakness, of joy and sadness, which is the basis of dramatic action.

There were certain well-known stories, both Biblical and classical, which illustrated the course of these extremes. The Elizabethan, like the classic audience, was trained to recognize such a theme at once, and to accept unquestioningly the stock characters, the scenes and the business traditionally employed to depict it. The Elizabethan audience was not the blacked-out, passive, and polite audience one thinks of now; it was active, cooperative, and boisterous, and in certain proportion, it was physically represented on the stage. In those days much more was left to the playgoer's imagination. He did not demand reality, he helped create illusion. He was trained to recognize all manner of dramatic symbols; such inconsistencies as those arising from the lack of women players, from multiple casting and representative characterization (as an army or a court numbering two boys) did not disturb the Elizabethan. He was trained to accept discrepancies caused by the physical limitations of his theatre. He was also trained to fill in any omissions of action or explanations of action. He did not question Bess's debonairly going to live with a man, nor quibble over why it should be permissible for Tamara to be the mistress of one man but not of another. In each case the action was necessary to the plot and completely acceptable to the audience. The twentieth century critic is less cooperative; he is ready to accept these situations or, he boasts, any others however unlikely—but only if they are made plausible by adequate motivation.

#### SALUTE TO THE ELIZABETHANS

Playwrights of any era are guided in the main by the customs of their own theatre, whether these rules are studied as formal

instruction or watched and imitated as a practical guide to popularity. Dramatic conventions, as they reveal themselves in the London productions of 1600-1605, stand like the rules of any game, for the man of little talent to follow and for the man of great talent to defy. The gallery of Elizabethan playwrights is composed of men of moderate stature and men of great stature and the product of their activity is solid and impressive. In the little men one finds bright flashes which can be pitted against those of great talent, a character here, a situation there, a moment of horror or exaltation, a touch of rough or tender humor, a flash of imagery, a strain of poetry. Many of these moments measure up to, and some surpass, the examples to which they are compared. But literary preeminence is dependent upon an author's repeated ability to produce work of importance. Moments of isolated brilliance are less difficult to achieve.

Spontaneous acclaim was given to one Elizabethan above all others, though the glory of the age was in its many stars. His plays, since his death, have experienced an increasing popularity. Unlike the dreaded oblivion which has obscured so many of his able contemporaries, he has enjoyed constant production all over the world, and the printing of his plays in more languages than he himself could name. His works rival the popularity of the Bible; and the early imprints, his first folio and the tiny quartos, fetch a princely ransom in the auction halls. Shakespeare was not self-conscious as to what conventions of playwriting he followed or did not follow. His great interest was in showing, as he found him, "that paragon of animals" and his genius is proven by the universality and understanding of his portrayal. Though the twentieth century thinks of Shakespeare as being modern for this reason, so did past centuries, and so undoubtedly will centuries to come. There seems to be more which remains indestructibly dramatic in Shakespeare's plays than in those of any other Elizabethan. His less familiar contemporaries, many of them great artists in their own right, are justly reserved for production by ingenious and discriminating directors, and for the

delight and inspiration of those readers who have the time and perseverance to thread their way through the morass of dated convention into the richest treasure trove of ideas for playwriting that exists.







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## II

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*New Mery and Wittie Comedie or Enterlude Newly Imprinted, A*,

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